Walt Whitman’s Journalism: Missing Files

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Abstract

Describes missing numbers of eleven newspapers that Whitman wrote for.
Here is not only the best imitation, by long odds, of Walt Whitman, the b'hoy-poet and representative man of Yankeedom, which we ever saw, but an excellent bit of sarcasm besides. The author is the same who wrote that capital parody on Southey's "On to Moscow," entitled "On to Richmond."

But the parody itself, written in the days when the Southern cause seemed triumphant, is lame and inept. Except for its mockery of Whitman's parallelism and "spasmodic" style, some gratuitous French, and a reference to Sesostris, the parody's chief interest is historical. It pictures Whitman as a drunken Northern jingoist, ranting to all who will listen (in the darkest days of the Northern cause) that the South is all but defeated; that the disastrous battles of Bull Run, Manassas, and Centre-ville were really Northern victories: "And didn't we celebrate the victory in a pundy branch on the Avenue? / I should say so." Ultimately, incoherent with drink, he passes out.

That Whitman, who did not leave for Washington for almost a year after the parody appeared, should be mocked as a bellicose spokesman of Northern aggression was not altogether without provocation on his part. Only two months earlier, on 28 September 1861, both Harper's Weekly and the New York New Leader had published his stirring call to arms, "Beat! Beat! Drums!" Ironically, this was Whitman's only war poem to be published before the appearance of Drum-Taps in 1865. The Southern Literary Messenger's virulent response shows how effective a war poem Whitman had composed.

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NOTES


3 Leaves of Grass, p. 283n. Two Drum-Taps poems had appeared in the 1860 edition: "Not the Pilot" (Leaves of Grass, p. 308) as a "Debris" poem; "Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice" (Leaves of Grass, pp. 315–316) as "Calamus, No. 5," a chant of brotherhood, not war.

WALT WHITMAN'S JOURNALISM: MISSING FILES

Despite extensive research, aided by an American Philosophical Society grant, I have failed to locate files or issues of some newspapers which Whitman either wrote for or edited, newspapers needed to help complete Walt Whitman, The Journalism, volumes in The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman (New York University Press).

Most needed are the following newspapers:

1. Long Island Patriot. 1831–1832.


6. New York *Sun*, 1842—1844. (Microfilm located.) Original file was in New York City Municipal Archives—probably destroyed by New York Public Library after microfilming.


8. New York *Democrat*, 17 or 18 July 1844 (first issue)—16 October 1844 (last issue). Editor.


Any help in locating missing numbers would be most gratefully received and fully acknowledged.

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