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## Whitman Allusions in Harper's Monthly to 1900

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## BIBLIOGRAPHIES

### WHITMAN ALLUSIONS IN *HARPER'S MONTHLY*: An Annotated List of Citations

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Whitman's greater struggle was not to utter the word Democratic, but to entice Modern Man to listen. In the nineteenth century favorable acceptance in monthly magazines provided access En Masse, but as Poe and Melville had already discovered, those access doors closed on eccentrics. Better equipped than his predecessors to wrestle successfully with Time, Strength and Patience, Whitman paraded his personal and literary eccentricities and dug in for the long war. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, founded in 1850, was one of the major battlegrounds. Since *Harper's* editors, like anonymous Wall Street lawyers, practiced the pragmatic virtues of prudence and method, it comes as no surprise that *Harper's* critics, in their commentaries on Whitman for a half-century, ignored the question of Whitman's improprieties. As George William Curtis put it in 1865, "Let us not argue the matter nor express any opinion" on Whitman's morality, "but ask whether there is no poetry in his verse." Up to the arrival of William Dean Howells in 1886, *Harper's* answer to that question was usually negative. After the arrival of Howells, *Harper's* general condescension toward Whitman lessened, replaced by Howells's more appreciative, if characteristically qualified, comments that Whitman's work cannot be considered "without respect, without deference, even if one cannot approach it with entire submission." Howells, whose strictures on *Leaves of Grass* decades earlier were quite severe, and whom Whitman grouped among the "fops" of the age (according to Justin Kaplan), remembered him in the 1890s with warmth, though his work was "not poetry, but the materials of poetry." Despite the vagaries of commentators, two or three Whitman poems, at least the more prudent ones, were accepted for publication in *Harper's* in each decade from the 1860s on.

The following thirty-nine citations represent every mention of Whitman and his work I have been able to locate in the first 100 volumes of *Harper's*. That number may seem relatively small, but *Harper's* did not pretend to be a critical review. Most comments on contemporary authors were made in passing, usually by Curtis. As a basis for comparison, the number of citations for Whitman approximates those of Holmes and Lowell, about half as many as Longfellow and Hawthorne, the American writers most frequently cited by *Harper's* columnists.

21 (September 1860), 555.

George William Curtis, writing from the "Editor's Easy Chair"\* on the

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\* Since Curtis occupied the "Editor's Easy Chair" from 1853 to 1892, citations drawn from that column, though anonymous, are attributed to him.

beauties of a New York summer and on how it is currently not “the thing” to take in the sights and sounds, refers to Fitz-Greene Halleck and Whitman as true appreciators of the city’s variety. Unfortunately, Whitman, however he might relish the spectacle, lacks the talent to make music of his description: “the vision expands as he gazes, and the spectator says fine and striking things, often with cadence, never with the essential melody of song.” An excerpt is included from Whitman’s poem “The Errand-Bearers,” which *Harper’s* lifted from the *New York Times*, 27 June 1860, and which was slightly revised and renamed “A Broadway Pageant” in *Drum-Taps*.

32 (December 1865), 123–124.

In his “Easy Chair” survey of holiday books, Curtis includes a brief notice of *Drum-Taps* following notices of Jean Ingelow’s *Songs of Seven* and Ticknor and Fields’s new edition of *Gems from Tennyson*: “If any reader is appalled by seeing that name in so choice a society, let us not argue the matter nor express any opinion, but ask whether there is no poetry in this wail upon the death of Lincoln, and in the ‘Song of the Drum’ which follows.” Excerpts from “O Captain! My Captain!” and “Beat! Beat! Drums!” follow.

35 (November 1867), 780.

In an article titled “More of the Great Show at Paris,” Moncure D. Conway, a frequent *Harper’s* contributor, describes the paintings and photographs of notable Americans competing unsuccessfully for spectators’ attention with a large case of engravings of American bank-notes: “Near them are some of ‘our most remarkable men’—Johnson (President) and Stanberry being very comfortably and appropriately shown as the two wings of Robert E. Lee. American destiny overhangs them, however, in the brow of Walt Whitman and the splendid eyes of Lucretia Mott. I am glad to see the best American heads so well represented.”

39 (August 1869), 350.

Whitman is included, along with Emerson, Lowell, Thoreau, Curtis, and Hawthorne, in a group of American authors admired by or at least familiar to the Irish poet William Allingham.

43 (November 1871), 931.

Curtis in his “Easy Chair” discussing the poems of William Ellery Channing the Younger, alludes to other “younger names,” including “‘the good gray poet,’ as Mr. W. D. O’Connor, his most loyal admirer, calls him, Walt Whitman.”

48 (February 1874), 366–367.

Publication of Whitman’s poem “Song of the Redwood-Tree.”

48 (March 1874), 524–525.

Publication of Whitman’s poem “Prayer of Columbus.”

50 (December 1874), 149.

The "Editor's Drawer," *Harper's* humor column written during these years by Colonel William A. Seaver, opens to reveal a clever parody of Whitman on his dismissal from the Bureau of Indian Affairs:

"Cursed, wretched, stupefied,  
Through me, indeed, to-day, a million or thereabouts  
Of withering and gall-imbittered emotions, disgusted,  
Ripple and regurgitate;  
Through me, the ancient privilege, too,  
To get upon my ear and imprecate.  
Foul be the wind that blows thee, and swift  
The trap that traps thee, O zealous Bristow!  
Implacable Kentuckian!  
Behold me! Thine and retrenchment's victim,  
Thrust heartlessly, with only two months' wages,  
On a cold, cold world!  
With heaven-kissing mercury ninety-eight degrees in the shade!  
O scanty pittance! O played-outness!  
Gone up! Obliterated!  
Scooped!"

52 (March 1876), 526.

Edwin Percy Whipple, assessing the progress of American literature for *Harper's* centennial series, "The First Century of the Republic," portrays Whitman as an innovator caught between "undue admiration" and "unjust neglect." His explosion upon the scene "expressing the habits, ideas, and ideals of the uncultivated," was welcomed by "minds jaded with reading works of culture." Unfortunately, Whitman ignored suggestions "that his daring disregard of convention should have one exception, and that he must modify his frank expression of the relations of the sexes. The author refused, and the completed edition of the *Leaves of Grass* fell dead from the press . . . but still the *Leaves of Grass*, if thoroughly cleaned, would even now be considered his ablest and most original work."

53 (June 1876), 141-142.

Curtis, in his "Easy Chair," defends America against British charges of neglecting Whitman. Whitman's problem in America is not attention, which Whitman receives in just proportion, but in esteem: "The suggestion that there is some kind of conspiracy in literary circles to suppress him, or some kind of jealousy of his superior genius, is merely amusing. . . . For twenty years America has read Walt Whitman, and, respecting all that it knows of his honorable life and his manly fidelity to conscience, it can not yet perceive the greatness of his poetic genius."

55 (September 1877), 624.

"Easy Chair" Curtis, discussing the impertinence of newspaper reporters, alludes to Whitman in this fashion: "It is sometimes whispered

that the fourth estate of the realm, the newspaper, is not slow to celebrate itself, as Mr. Whitman says, although not with his 'barbaric yawp.'"

59 (October 1879), 683.

In a discussion of American genre painting in "Fifty Years of American Art," S. G. W. Benjamin argues that the "Energy of action, and an effort after effect verging on exaggeration and caricature" are characteristics which "suggest in color the literature of Artemus Ward and Walt Whitman."

62 (April 1881), 701.

Publication of Whitman's poem "Patrolling Barnegat."

64 (January 1882), 313.

In a brief survey of eight new volumes of poetry in the "Editor's Literary Record," the new edition of *Leaves of Grass* is mentioned last and is the only book to receive derogatory comment: "a congeries of bizarre rhapsodies, that are neither sane verse nor intelligible prose."

64 (February 1882), 334-335.

Whitman is included in a brief discussion of Philadelphia (and vicinity) writers by George Parsons Lathrop. Whitman "seems to be more generally appreciated in Philadelphia than by our *litterateurs* elsewhere; but he is hardly a man to be 'grouped.'"

64 (May 1882), 891.

E. C. Stedman, in an essay "Some London Poets," alludes to a discussion with Swinburne in which the British poet dismissed Lowell and Bryant as lacking "the pulse, the fire, the passion, of music," but felt that Whitman, "when not speaking poor prose, sings, and when he sings at all, sings well, his artistic fault being a narrow formalism."

65 (August 1882), 469.

The writer of the "Editor's Easy Chair" half-seriously chides his fellow Americans for preferring the indoors to the out-of-doors even on a holiday: "Leisure is still a little sinful to him, and he looks askance at the wicked Walt Whitman, who openly prints that he 'loafs and invites his soul.' No wonder that the Society for the Suppression of Vice prosecutes such an offender!"

65 (September 1882), 639.

*Essays from "The Critic,"* which includes essays by Whitman, John Burroughs, E. C. Stedman, and others, is given a brief, sympathetic notice.

68 (February 1884), 467.

Annie Fields, in her reminiscences of Emerson, "Glimpses of Emerson," remembers with little elaboration a literary conversation in which Emerson spoke of various writers, including Whitman.

68 (March 1884), 607.

Publication of Whitman's poem "With Husky-Haughty Lips, O Sea!"

70 (January 1885), 264.

Publication of Whitman's poem "Of that Blithe Throat of Thine."

73 (September 1886), 633.

Once again, when Curtis in his "Easy Chair" department has the occasion to discuss a form of self-celebration, he alludes to "Song of Myself." In this case, the occasion is the Fourth of July: "The cities which, with Walt Whitman, have justly and proudly celebrated themselves this summer, have their individual distinction."

73 (October 1886), 803.

William Dean Howells, who now conducts the "Editor's Study," in a review of Marco Antonio Canini's *Il Libro dell' Amore*, quotes from Canini's introduction regarding American love poets: "I offer the reader some poems from the American poets who have written in English, which are lovely indeed. But Walt Whitman is not a love-poet; the love-songs of Longfellow are few; and Russell Lowell, who is the first of their love-poets, has greater fame as a humorist."

73 (October 1886), 804-805.

In a discussion of George Parsons Lathrop's criticism of poetry, Howells in his "Editor's Study" advises critics to avoid didacticism, such as that displayed by Madame Bentzon in her review of E. C. Stedman's *American Poets* in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. She had warned American poets "not to be too American if we wish to be at all, and to beware of making Americanism a fanatic cult, as Walt Whitman does."

73 (November 1886), 823-824, 832.

In his essay "The Literary Movement in New York," George Parsons Lathrop portrays Whitman as the embodiment of the city's size, energy, and variety: "But of all the people with poetic voices who have lived on this populous island, Walt Whitman alone has attempted to reproduce its elements in a shape suggesting their mass and variety, and with a spirit responding to and interpreting them; for 'Ah, what,' he says, 'can ever be more stately and admirable to me than mast-hemm'd Manhattan?' His method, to be sure, is crude, unfinished, often mistaken—and he alternates dull prose with gleams of splendid poetry. But perhaps by virtue of this mixture he is all the better fitted to express the actual New York. The largeness of his grasp, and his purely native tone, will always serve to remind us of the radical course and the independent steps that must be taken before this part of the world can have an adequate portrayal in poetry." Later in the same essay Lathrop briefly mentions the "Pfaff group," including Whitman.

76 (January 1888), 323.

The writer of the "Editor's Drawer," probably Charles Dudley Warner, making a New Year's resolution to read those writers he has long avoided, mentions, perhaps without seriousness, that Whitman is among them.

76 (February 1888), 478-479.

Reviewing James Elliot Cabot's *Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson* in his "Editor's Study," Howells mentions that Cabot "has not touched at all one of the most interesting facts, from a literary point of view, in Emerson's history," his judgment of Whitman. In addition to Emerson's "perception of the great and fruitful elements in Walt Whitman's work," were his strictures on "the manners, if not the morals" of his protege. Emerson "felt a keen sympathy with the aesthetic revolt so courageously embodied" in Whitman's poetry and "could foresee the advantages of bringing poetry nearer to the language and the carriage of life, as Mr. Whitman's work seemed promising to do." Howells goes on to discuss Tolstoy in the light of "a certain beautiful lawlessness" of form and expression that he sees in Emerson and Whitman and links it to the development of realism: "perhaps the reader will not even find wholly novel the assertion that beside this verity the realism of the extremest French and American apostles shrinks into bald convention. But this is true, as a rule . . . while we commend Mr. Whitman's work, both in verse and prose, as a signal exception to this."

78 (February 1889), 488-489.

In his well-known review of Whitman's *November Boughs*, Howells indicates that a new epoch has been reached in criticism of Whitman's work: "we think no one now would like to consider the result without respect, without deference, even if one cannot approach it with entire submission." Howells credits Whitman with having created a new genre in literature, "which we may or may not allow to be poetry, but which we cannot deny is something eloquent, suggestive, moving, with a lawless, formless beauty of its own." Having braved nearly half a century of contumely and mockery, Whitman can now be credited with making it possible "for poetry hereafter to be more direct and natural than hitherto." The critic offers the hope that some future editor of Whitman's poetry might with "judicious pencil" remove the few offensive lines of Whitman's "celebration of the five senses." The book at hand, *November Boughs*, can be read "without misgiving."

78 (March 1889), 660.

Whitman's letter on the 300th anniversary of the city of Santa Fe is quoted regarding America's need to study and cherish its ethnic diversity.

81 (July 1890), 311.

Whether or not due to Howells' influence, Curtis in his "Easy Chair" takes a more tolerant view of Whitman than had been his wont in the past. Discussing the value of literary criticism, Curtis recognizes the limitations of critics who seek to assess the greatness of contemporary writers. Critics may influence the current popular reputation of a poet, but for example, there "is no critic living who can foretell whether a hundred years hence our good friend Walt Whitman will be accepted as a great poet or have fallen into the limbo where the vast throng" of past poets lie.

83 (July 1891), 280.

In an article celebrating Oliver Wendell Holmes's career, G. W. Curtis reiterates the thought of a year earlier: "No one knows more surely than he who writes of a living author how hard it is to forecast fame, and how dangerous is prophecy." When a critic salutes the work of a young author, as Emerson saluted Whitman's initial appearance, the critic has only "generalized a strong personal impression."

83 (November 1891), 962-963.

Once again, even at this late date, the question arises as to whether or not America has developed a unique national literature. Howells in his "Editor's Study" views sarcastically those English critics who keep harping on America's literary poverty, but of course, "it never was necessary for an Englishman to know anything of American affairs before writing about them." Given the fact that for most English critics Whitman is the sole unique American writer, it is no wonder that in their minds "we have not a national literature in the proportion that we do not write like Mr. Whitman." It appears that the English are terribly fearful that if America is acknowledged to have a national literature it might supplant English literature as "the literature of the whole race" and the English language might have to be spelled according to Webster: "It is our misfortune rather than our fault to have arrived when all the literary forms were invented. There remained nothing for us to do but to invent literary formlessness, and this, we understand, is what the English admire Mr. Whitman for doing. But there is a curious want of variety in formlessness . . . and Mr. Whitman seems to have exhausted the resources of formlessness. We cannot go on in his way without servile imitation; the best we can do, since we cannot be rational in form, is to be rational in spirit and in ideal, and we rather think that in many good ways we are unmistakably so." Whitman's way is not the only way, but merely representative of "one of our moods," while Longfellow, Twain, James, etc. represent others.

84 (April 1892), 652.

*Harper's* prints a portrait of Whitman by J. W. Alexander.

84 (April 1892), 707-709.

Publication of Whitman's poem "Death's Valley."

91 (June 1895), 65.

In his "First Impressions of Literary New York" Howells recalls the time when Whitman "had as hopeless a cause with the critics on either side of the ocean as any man could have." Then suddenly, while the English were employing him as an example of how America neglects its genius, the *Saturday Press* "made him their cult." It was at this time that Howells, on his literary pilgrimage, met Whitman at Pfaff's and instantly liked him. Many years later they met again following a lecture by Whitman on Lincoln: "Then and always he gave me the sense of a sweet and true soul, and I felt in him a spiritual dignity. . . . The apostle of the rough, the uncouth, was the gentlest person; his barbaric yawp, translated into the terms of social encounter, was an address of singular quiet, delivered in a voice of winning and endearing friendliness." His work is a "liberating force," but what he achieved "was a means and not an end," in his poetry: "His verse seems to me not poetry, but the materials of poetry, like one's emotions; yet I would not misprize it, and I am glad to own that I have had moments of great pleasure in it."

91 (June 1895), 67.

*Harper's* prints an engraving of Howells meeting Whitman in Pfaff's.

91 (June 1895), 70.

Other "First Impressions of New York" include a visit with William D. O'Connor, who "had not yet risen to be the chief of Walt Whitman's champions outside of the *Saturday Press*."

92 (May 1896), 961.

In a dissertation on crows, Charles Dudley Warner, who now occupies Howells's old stand in the "Editor's Study" and is given to broad disagreement with most of his predecessor's views, concludes: "I wish I could sing the crow! No poet has ever done it, not even Walt Whitman, who might have had a surer hold on immortality by singing the crow than by singing himself."

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