

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-44807-9 - The Cambridge Companion to Walt Whitman

Ezra Greenspan

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The essays in this book, written for this volume by an international team of distinguished Whitman scholars, examine a variety of contemporary issues in Whitman's life and art. These scholars bring to their analyses a multiplicity of approaches mirroring at once the diversity of contemporary scholarship and the range of subjects that Whitman affords for such examination.

Writing out of a common concern for redefining Whitman in current terms, the authors of these essays address a wide-ranging series of issues befitting a poet of his stature and ambiguity: Whitman and photography, Whitman and feminist scholarship, Whitman and modernism, Whitman and the poetics of address, Whitman and the poetics of present participles, Whitman and Borges, Whitman and Isadora Duncan, Whitman and the Civil War, Whitman and the politics of his era, and Whitman and the changing nature of his style in his later years.

This volume is addressed to an audience of students and general readers and is written accordingly in a nontechnical style designed to promote accessibility to the study of Whitman. It includes a chronology of Whitman's life and Suggestions for Further Reading designed to provide background and additional information for such readers.

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EDITED BY
EZRA GREENSPAN

University of South Carolina



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CHRONOLOGY OF WHITMAN'S LIFE

- 1819 Born Walter Whitman on May 31 at West Hills, Long Island, the second of the eight children of Louisa Van Velsor and Walter Whitman.
- 1823 Family moves from its Long Island farm to Brooklyn, then still a village, where Whitman's father seeks to improve his fortunes.
- 1825–30 Attends public schools in Brooklyn.
- 1830–1 Begins doing odd jobs; formal schooling ends.
- 1831 Sent to begin formal apprenticeship at the printing office of the *Long Island Patriot*, a Democratic paper read by his father.
- 1832 Transferred to the printing office of the *Long Island Star*, the leading paper in Brooklyn, where he remains until 1835.
- 1836–8 Unable to find employment as a printer in Manhattan, reunites with his family, now back on Long Island, and begins his first period of school teaching.
- 1838 Launches his first publishing project as editor/proprietor of the *Long Islander*, a weekly newspaper.
- 1839–41 Suspends the *Long Islander*, works briefly as a writer for James Brenton's *Long Island Democrat*, and then returns to teaching on Long Island.
- 1841 Returns to Manhattan in the spring as a printer, finding employment in the printing office of Park Benjamin's popular weekly, the *New World*. Begins placing stories and poems with New York's leading magazine, the *Democratic Review*.
- 1842 Becomes editor in February of a penny daily, the New York *Aurora*. Fired in late April. Accepts an invitation from Park Benjamin to write a temperance novel; *Franklin Evans* published in November in the *New World's* "Books for the People" series.

CHRONOLOGY OF WHITMAN'S LIFE

- 1843–5 Edits a variety of Manhattan papers and publishes occasional poems and stories in the press.
- 1845 Moves back to Brooklyn in August and reunites with his family. Begins contributing to the Brooklyn *Evening Star*.
- 1846–8 Becomes editor in February of the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, a position he holds for two years.
- 1848 Fired in January by publishers of the *Daily Eagle* for political views. Accepts an offer to write for the New Orleans *Crescent*. Spends the spring in New Orleans, then returns home to Brooklyn. Finds and edits a Free Soil newspaper, the Brooklyn *Freeman*.
- 1849 Resigns editorship of the *Freeman* in September. Writes freelance articles for the New York *Sunday Dispatch*.
- 1850 Edits briefly the New York *Daily News*, his last regular editorial position until after the publication of *Leaves of Grass*.
- 1851–4 Works as a house builder in Brooklyn and contributes occasional articles to the press. Works on free verse style and poems.
- 1855 Self-publishes the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, issued in Brooklyn in July. Emerson's congratulatory letter soon follows.
- 1856 Publishes the second edition of *Leaves of Grass* in September. Visited at home by Bronson Alcott and Henry David Thoreau.
- 1857–9 Unable to find a publisher for the third edition of *Leaves of Grass*, returns to journalism as editor of the Brooklyn *Daily Times*.
- 1859 Leaves the *Daily Times* in the summer and returns to composition of poems and preparation of an expanded and revised edition of *Leaves of Grass* for the press.
- 1860 Publishes the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* with Thayer and Eldridge in Boston. Intends to issue a follow-up volume, tentatively titled *Banner at Day-Break*, but the plan falls through when Thayer and Eldridge fails in December, leaving Whitman without a publisher or clear direction.
- 1862 Journeys in December to northern Virginia to locate his soldier brother, reported as wounded in the New York *Herald*. Moved by the spectacle of war and comradeship, he chooses to remain near the front and relocates in Washington, D.C., his primary place of residence until 1873.

CHRONOLOGY OF WHITMAN'S LIFE

- 1863–4 Finds employment in a government office as a copyist and begins voluntary service as a male nurse in army hospitals. Unsuccessfully seeks a publisher for a book of hospital sketches while continuing to compose war poems. Begins a long friendship with Ellen and William Douglas O'Connor and with the people in their Washington circle.
- 1865 Publishes *Drum-Taps* in May and *Sequel to Drum-Taps* (featuring the newly composed “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d”) in the fall. Fired in June from his new clerkship in the Department of the Interior for the alleged obscenity of *Leaves of Grass*, but soon afterward employed in the office of the attorney general. Meets and befriends an ex-Confederate soldier, Peter Doyle, who becomes his most intimate friend during the remainder of his Washington years.
- 1866–7 Publishes the fourth edition of *Leaves of Grass* in New York.
- 1868 First foreign edition of Whitman’s poetry, *Poems*, selected and edited by William Michael Rossetti, brought out in England.
- 1870 Book publication of *Democratic Vistas*, two parts of which had been issued several years previously in the *Galaxy*.
- 1871 Publishes the fifth edition of *Leaves of Grass* in Washington, D.C. Separate publication of *Passage to India*. Reads his new poem, “After All, Not to Create Only,” written specially for the occasion, at the opening of the American Institute in New York.
- 1872 Reads a poem (“As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free”) by invitation of students at the Dartmouth College commencement. Publishes *As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free and Other Poems* as a pamphlet in New York. A pirated edition (technically, the sixth) of *Leaves of Grass* published by John Camden Hotten in London (but not actually issued until the following year).
- 1873 Suffers his first paralytic stroke January 23. Left partially disabled and further depressed by the death of his mother in July, he moves in with his brother in Camden, New Jersey, which becomes his home for the rest of his life.
- 1874 Loses his government position and, with it, his main source of income.
- 1875 Hopes to be named official poet at the Centennial Exposition, to be held in Philadelphia, but is disappointed when Bayard Taylor, his onetime admirer, is chosen instead.

CHRONOLOGY OF WHITMAN'S LIFE

- 1876 Marks the Centennial by publishing *Two Rivulets* and an "Author's Edition" of *Leaves of Grass*. Anne Gilchrist, a widowed Englishwoman and admirer of Whitman and his poetry, moves to Philadelphia to be close to him. Whitman begins his recuperative visits to the Pennsylvania farm of the Staffords, with whose son he is particularly close.
- 1877 Receives visits from the English intellectual Edward Carpenter and the Canadian alienist Richard Maurice Bucke. The latter quickly becomes his vocal supporter, biographer, and all-purpose adviser.
- 1878 His health improved, he visits in Manhattan and travels up the Hudson to stay with his old friend and first biographer, John Burroughs.
- 1879 Travels for the first time across the Mississippi, stopping first briefly at St. Louis to visit with his favorite brother, Jeff, and his family before continuing as far west as Colorado. This, the longest trip of his life, dissolves into a fiasco; Whitman is stranded in St. Louis until given a loan from the publisher James Fields, with which to return east.
- 1880 Visits with Bucke in London, Ontario, his first trip outside the United States.
- 1881 Publishes the seventh edition of *Leaves of Grass* with James Osgood of Boston.
- 1882 Threatened with prosecution for obscenity by the Boston district attorney, Osgood removes *Leaves of Grass* from circulation. Whitman purchases the plates and arranges first with Rees Welsh, then with David McKay, both of Philadelphia, for its publication. Whitman's prose autobiography, *Specimen Days and Collect*, is published by McKay. Visited by Oscar Wilde, one of many notable men of letters to visit him during his last decade, as his reputation spreads nationally and internationally.
- 1883 Spends time at the Jersey shore with John Burroughs.
- 1884 Buys his own home, easily accessible to the Philadelphia ferry, at 328 Mickle Street, the residence of his final years.
- 1885-7 Quiet years of declining health spent mostly at or near home with friends and visitors.
- 1888 Horace Traubel, a frequent visitor at Mickle Street, begins to take notes of their conversations. With Traubel's help, Whitman publishes *Complete Poems and Prose* in an edition of

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- 600 copies and *November Boughs*. Whitman suffers a stroke in June.
- 1889 Enjoys the public festivities held in Camden to celebrate his seventieth birthday.
- 1891 With Traubel's aid, publishes *Good-Bye My Fancy* and prepares for the press a final issue of *Leaves of Grass*, complete with annexes.
- 1892 Dies March 26.