

LOVING COMRADES: LANCASHIRE'S LINKS TO WALT WHITMAN

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Then and Now

WALT WHITMAN HAS BECOME RECOGNIZED as America's greatest poet, but the meaning of his writing has been and remains the subject of deep controversy in his home country and abroad. During the 1950s and 1960s American and Soviet literary scholars fought out the Cold War on the slightly bizarre terrain of whether Whitman was a socialist or not. More recently, he has been claimed by America's powerful gay community, to the irritation of many social conservatives. I think Whitman must be smiling somewhere, under our bootsoles, at all of this. During his life, he was fond of tossing off cheeky and misleading hints about his personal life and his politics. He was large enough or evasive enough to attract followers of very diverse political leanings. One of the most remarkable examples is the way the early socialist movement in Britain took to Whitman and saw him as a standard-bearer for revolution.

This essay is about the relationship between Whitman and a small group of rather eccentric men and women living in and around Bolton, Lancashire, England. A vague awareness of this group, sometimes referred to as the "Bolton College," has existed somewhere near the margins of Whitman scholarship, but few know of the complexity of the group or of the bases of its attachment to Whitman. Most, but not all, of the Bolton disciples were part of Britain's early socialist movement, and James W. Wallace, the leader of the group, was a tireless evangelist who spread Whitman's gospel within the socialist movement in the 1890s and early 1900s. To understand these people's devotion to Whitman, it is necessary first to understand a little about the fate of socialism in Britain.

I first published this essay as a small booklet in 1984, at the time of the British Miners' Strike. I introduced it then by saying that socialism had been "on the retreat these last ten years"; it seems, thirteen years later, that many of the principles of socialism, at least as we understood it then, are now dead and waiting for a respectful burial by a reformed Labour Party with Britain's new Prime Minister Tony Blair as undertaker-in-chief. This death of socialism is not necessarily a bad thing.

Every generation needs to question its beliefs and principles. The old truisms of Labour left and right, as well as those of the Communist and Trotskyist left, have been challenged by the rise of new forces—in particular the women’s movement and the Greens. If the old-fashioned socialism, which grew out of the discredited ideologies of both social democracy and Marxism-Leninism, is dead, many of the wrongs which inspired socialists in the past are still very much with us. In the United Kingdom, there are millions out of work, and many millions more in low-paying and unrewarding jobs without any security. Many young people feel completely alienated from society and vent their frustration in anti-social activities harmful to both themselves and their communities. We continue to inflict enormous damage to our environment and our health by building more and more roads and manufacturing millions of cars every year. I could go on—about how starvation in the third world co-exists with massive profits made by transnational companies—but we need to turn our attention to Whitman. And what I have been preaching about is very much relevant to the Bolton response to Whitman, then and now.

One of the greatest challenges to “old” (that is, post-1917) orthodoxies has been the recognition in the 1970s and 1980s of the importance of personal relations—how we live our lives, construct our sexual relations, how we love. These were all matters we were once told were “a diversion from the class struggle.” Long before we theorized the political importance of these seemingly personal matters, Whitman had already worked it out. He also revered nature and knew that humans needed to respect it and create *with* it, not against it. Our “new” personal-political and ecological concerns are, of course, not new at all; they have just been lost, buried, or forgotten in the “long march of labor.”

The early days of the socialist movement saw an immensely rich flowering of ideas, which are only just being rediscovered. The socialist clubs and socialist Sunday schools, Clarion cycling and rambling clubs, vocal unions and debating societies, all suggest a socialist culture in the 1880s and 1890s of far greater depth than what we have today. The early socialist organizations—the Social Democratic Federation, the Independent Labour Party, and the myriad local groups, including anarchists—worked together for a common cause. William Morris, Tolstoy, Kropotkin, and Edward Carpenter were at least as popular as the more commonly remembered figures like Keir Hardie or Marx and Engels. So much of that libertarian socialist tradition is now lost. Women played a major part in this socialist culture: Katherine Conway (later Glasier), Caroline Martyn, Enid Stacy, and Margaret Macmillan were four of the most popular socialist speakers in the early 1890s, and many women were active at the grass-roots level. These early socialists questioned

every aspect of life: the capitalist economic system was rotten, certainly, and so too was its liberal-Tory politics. But, for many socialists, the criticism went further. Capitalist morality itself was obnoxious—including the crass dual standards of Victorian morality which oppressed women and readily used child labor; the religious hypocrisy; and even the philistine standards in architecture, literature, design, and dress.

The socialist response to these ills was a broad range of alternative life-styles. Some tried communal living, such as the Daisy Hill Colony at Blackpool, started by a group of working-class socialists from Bolton. Many built up an alternative life-style within the thriving socialist culture of the day by becoming active in its club life and other social activity alongside the straight “political” work. Some dabbled in forms of mysticism: spiritualism, faith healing, and eastern religious practices. In Bolton, every facet of this diverse socialist culture could be found. To take 1896 as a sample year, we find an active branch of the Social Democratic Federation, led by the popular shoemaker Joe Shufflebotham. Bolton’s Labour Church was one of the country’s largest, with James Sims—a venerable old radical—as president; it had close ties to both the Social Democratic Federation and the new Independent Labour Party, which had opened its new premises on Bowker’s Row three years earlier. A section of the Clarion Cycling Club had recently been formed in the town, and the socialist dialect writer Allen Clarke had just started publishing his *Teddy Ashton’s Journal*. There was a strong current of liberal radicalism in the town, spearheaded by Solomon Partington, and a growing feminist movement which owed much to the work of Sarah Reddish, who later became president of the national Women’s Co-operative Guild.

Bolton’s depth and range of socialism was not unique in Lancashire. What is distinctive about Bolton’s socialist history is its connection with Walt Whitman. As we shall see, Whitman was regarded at the time as a centrally important “prophet” of the new religion of socialism. The Whitman group in Bolton built up a network of international socialist contacts based on their shared love of Whitman’s poetry and philosophy. In Britain, that network included Keir Hardie, Edward Carpenter, Katherine Conway and her future husband John Bruce Glasier; the network stretched to North America, where Horace Traubel, John Burroughs, and Richard M. Bucke (admittedly more of a mystic than a socialist) were involved in sustaining radical relationships. George Russell (AE) was a close friend in Ireland, as was John Addington Symonds in his Swiss retreat; others as far away as Japan were involved as well.

The small group of clerks, clergymen, and skilled workers that made up the Bolton Whitmanites are of interest today for a number of reasons. Their connection with the great figures of socialism is one. But equally interesting is the depth and continuity of their love for each other, spanning lifetimes and continuing into second and third genera-

tions. Their capacity to discuss taboo subjects such as homosexuality casts further illumination on "personal politics" in late Victorian Britain. Finally, what bound the group together was its sense of loving comradeship, which its members saw as a vital preliminary and essential ingredient for any socialist society worthy of the name. Now that the term "ethical socialism" is once again current in British political discourse, perhaps some of Whitman's meanings and messages will help shape the developing definition of the term, just as his work helped shape socialism for the Bolton group from the 1880s through the 1920s.

The Importance of Whitman to Socialists

In England, William Michael Rossetti was the first to publicize the new, radical poetry of Whitman; John Addington Symonds and Edward Carpenter, both gay intellectuals but separated politically and in their attitudes to women, did much to get Whitman known in English literary circles. Carpenter went beyond this small circle and began to get Whitman known in the labor movement. He had visited the poet in 1877 (and returned to see him again seven years later) and viewed him as a prophetic figure; Carpenter's poems in his book *Towards Democracy* (1883-1902) were consciously based on Whitman's work and helped increase Whitman's own popularity, particularly in the British socialist movement. Carpenter suggests that what so endeared Whitman to socialists of the day was his capacity for love:

He was a man in whom the power of love was developed to an extraordinary degree. Yet (thanks to him) this was no attenuated or merely spiritual love, but was a large and generous passion, spiritual and emotional of course, but well rooted in the physical and sexual also. In him the various sides and manifestations of the passions were so blended that instead of weakening they recognized and reinforced each other . . . piercing through the layers of caste, through differences of race, climate, character and occupation; despising distances of space and time, he drew men and women of the most varied nature and habits to himself. . . . "Leaves of Grass" is the meeting ground of the human race. There every nationality, every creed, every trade, every atom of humanity is represented, and all are fused in the great loving soul that overbroods them. (*Days with Walt Whitman*, 56-58)

To this consuming idea of love, which Carpenter understood both as a specific, localized, homoerotic love and as a much broader love of all humanity, Carpenter added democracy to the list of qualities that made Whitman appeal to the socialists; he loved Whitman's celebration of the American working man and woman, the typical, common laborers that Whitman loved:

A song for occupations!
In the labor of engines and trades and the labor of fields I find the developments
And find the eternal meanings.

Workmen and workwomen!

...

Neither a servant nor a master I,

I take no sooner a large price than a small price, I will have my own whoever enjoys
me,

I will be even with you and you shall be even with me. (LG, 211)

Whitman's celebration of nature is another central theme that explains his attraction to the British socialists. Socialism was very much an open-air movement in the 1890s, with rallies on the moors, and rambling and botanical clubs linked to socialist activity. The rambling notes of Allen Clarke's *Teddy Ashton's Journal* began with the Whitman appeal: "Whoever you are—come with me!" and it isn't difficult to recognize the attraction of a poem like "By Broad Potomac's Shore":

Again old heart so gay, again to you, your sense, the full flush spring returning,
Again the freshness and the odors, again Virginia's summer sky, pellucid blue and
silver,

Again the forenoon purple of the hills,

Again the deathless grass, so noiseless, soft and green,

Again the blood red roses blooming. (LG, 482)

Whitman never won the recognition he sought from American workers, but the extent to which he captured the hearts of British working class socialists is remarkable. The appeal founded on love and comradeship, democracy and nature, was irresistible to the strongly ethical-based socialism of the north. Perhaps Robert Blatchford, editor of *The Clarion*, did more than anyone to express that sort of socialism in a popular way, and in this extract from "The New Religion in the North," his debt to Whitman is obvious:

This new religion which is rousing and revivifying the north of England is something much higher and greater than a wages question, an hours question, a franchise question, based though it is on some of those things. . . . It is a religion of manhood and womanhood, of sweetness and of light. . . . [F]or this we are indebted to the idol-breaking of Carlyle, the ideal-making of Ruskin, and to the trumpet-tongued proclamation by the titanic Whitman of the great message of true democracy and the brave and sweet comradeship of the natural life—of the stainless, virile, thorough human life, lived out boldly and frankly in the open air and in the eyes of God.

While Whitman's adoption by British socialism in the 1880s and 1890s owed a lot to Carpenter and particularly the efforts of the Bolton group, there remains a problem. Whitman never described himself as a socialist—he was more the radical democrat typified by Lincoln and Emerson. In his later years, though, at the prompting of his close friend, the socialist Horace Traubel, he did move towards an acceptance of socialist ideas. Traubel recounts an incident where Whitman gets rattled at having been described in a British journal as "a socialist." He con-

cludes by saying: "Of course I'm a good deal more of a socialist than I thought I was, maybe not technically, politically so, but intrinsically, in my meanings." British readers of Whitman interpreted his work in precisely this way and found great strength in his poetry. In socialist periodicals of the 1890s it was common to find, alongside ads for socialist classics, advertisements for *Leaves of Grass* and cheap editions of Whitman's work.

Eagle Street College

J. W. Wallace—"Wallace" to his friends—was the central figure in the Bolton group. He was born in a small shop on Bridge Street in 1853. His father was a millwright who had moved down from Northumberland to find work in the Lancashire cotton industry; he later spent much time in Russia equipping new mills there. His mother was from Bolton, "a kind gentle woman who suffered for many years the most agonizing torture of rheumatism," according to Wallace's friend, Fred Wild. Most of Wallace's early years were spent at 14 Eagle Street, off Bury Road, described by Wild as "one of the worst streets in The Haulgh." At the age of fourteen he started work at Bradshaw's, a local firm of architects with whom he stayed all his working life until his early retirement in 1912. Perhaps Wallace was not atypical of many bright, working-class children of his time. Through sympathetic parents and the opportunities afforded by the expansion of late-Victorian capitalism, he was able to rise into the ranks of the lower middle class, becoming an architect's assistant. He was dogged by poor health and bad eyesight, and he moved into the more rural surroundings of Adlington in the early 1890s, living at 40 Babylon Lane. He was looked after by two housekeepers, the first a Mrs. Jones. The second was the widow of a friend of Wallace's, Minnie Whiteside. She appears to have been completely devoted to Wallace and he to her; eventually she came to be regarded as his adopted daughter.

Wallace was an avid reader in his youth, an interest he shared with two close friends—Fred Wild, a cotton waste merchant who lived on Dorset Street, and Dr. John Johnston, a general practitioner at 54 Manchester Road, originally from Annan, Dumfriesshire. Fred Wild was a jovial personality but deeply cultivated—a talented painter and an authority on Shakespeare. His obituary in 1935 reads in part:

Certainly he was a personality with a leaning to the unorthodox in his interests and opinions. He was a keen socialist and Blatchfordite in the days when few men of his class were identified with left wing politics and was a lively member of debating clubs which flourished in those days, and a founder of Bolton Labour Church. (*Bolton Evening News*, July 23, 1935)

Dr. Johnston is an equally interesting figure, and he led a remarkably active life. He played a leading role in medical and health issues in Bolton, particularly concerning the question of child labor in the mills. His book *The Wastage of Child Life* was a brilliant exposé of the damage done to children in Bolton's mills. He spent much of his spare time as an instructor for the St. John's Ambulance Brigade and railway ambulance classes in the Bolton area. In his diary for 1887 there is a poignant entry accompanying a news cutting about "a fatal accident at Trinity Street station"; William Davies, a shunter, fell off a truck and was run over, resulting in the breaking of both his legs and the loss of his left foot. Johnston commented, "The poor fellow was one of the members of my ambulance class and has left a wife and five children. Alas! Alas!" (Johnston diaries, 1887). Johnston was also involved in the Bolton Labour Church and strongly opposed both the Boer War and the First World War. Yet his humanity was such that he spent days and nights trying to repair the human damage done by the war's carnage, first at Whalley Military Hospital and then at Townleys. There was a lighter side to his character as well: he was a keen cyclist, often seen around town on a tricycle! Quite apart from his activities in the Whitman group, he was also deeply involved in the cultural life of Bolton.

Wallace, Wild, and Johnston—each exceptional in his own way—formed the nucleus of the Bolton Whitman group. They read, often together at Wallace's, the works of Burns, Carlyle, Tennyson, Ruskin, and Emerson. They soon picked out Whitman as their favorite author and started regular Monday evening meetings at which Whitman would be the main topic of conversation. Others, like Wentworth Dixon, joined the meetings, and Johnston dubbed the group "The Eagle Street College." It was in 1885, just after the death of Wallace's mother, that the "college" began meeting on this regular basis. Dixon describes the group, and I have added, where known, the occupations of the various members:

The death in 1885 of his mother, to whom he was strongly attached, caused him profound sorrow. At this period, the reading of Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" was a source of great spiritual comfort. He would recite to us with great feeling numerous passages from "Leaves." The meaning of some of these poems was somewhat obscure to several of us and caused animated discussions, but lucid explanations were always forthcoming from Wallace. The friends who foregathered at Eagle Street at this time were Fred Wild [cotton waste dealer], Dr. Johnston, Richard Greenhalgh [bank clerk], William Law, Sam Hodgkinson [hosiery manufacturer], William Pimblett [engineering employer's federation secretary], Rev. Tyas, Rev. F. R. C. Hutton [St. George's Congregational Church], Richard Curwen, Thomas Shorrocks [magistrate's clerk], William Ferguson [bank clerk], Fred Nightingale [clerk] and myself [lawyer's clerk]. (Wentworth Dixon, "An Old Friend," address to the Men's Class at Bank Street School, February 7, 1926)

This is not an exhaustive list of the early members of the group, which was more fluid at this time than in later years. Wallace refers to "two artisans," including George Humphries, a millwright, and an unnamed engine driver, possibly Pullen. Later recruits in the 1890s include Rev. Scott of Harwood Unitarian Church and Charles F. Sixsmith (manager of Bentinck Mill, Farnworth, and a very eccentric character) and visitors such as W. M. Cart, an architect, and his colleague Charles Holden, along with L' Hoondi Raj Thangdi, who lived in Bolton for a few years and later became president of the Indian Congress. Fred Wild, in his genial but blunt way, describes them: "These young men were all from the Parish Church and for the most part were engaged as clerks or minor gaffers and were attracted to Wallace by his personality and intellectual powers, but not one of them except Dr. Johnston and myself could be called 'Whitmanites'" (Wild, "Sketch of Life of J. A. W. Wallace of Bolton").

As Dixon honestly admitted, some of the discussions at Eagle Street tended towards the esoteric, but what does stand out is the basic continuity of the group over an extended period of time: Wallace, Johnston, Wild, Dixon, Ferguson, Nightingale, Shorrocks, and Greenhalgh remained part of the group until their deaths. Wallace suggests the reason for the group's remarkable cohesion:

Its basic element was certainly friendship—hearty, fullblooded, intimate, free, of long growth and freighted with old associations. Another element, not less vital, was the almost religious character of our meetings which developed as time went on. . . . [W]e were old friends who could talk together on any subject quite frankly without fear of giving offence. . . . There were times when it led us, by imperceptible stages, to a deepened intimacy, in which the inmost quests and experiences of the soul were freely expressed, and each grew conscious of our essential unity, as of a larger self which included us all. (J. Johnston and J. W. Wallace, *Visits to Walt Whitman in 1890-1891*, 19)

Wallace's writing at this time is drenched with mystical references and symbolism, and certainly there was plenty of that in Whitman himself. However, the death of Wallace's mother does seem to have resulted in a profound change in his consciousness, what he called an illumination, or an entering into "cosmic consciousness." He later related his experiences to his Canadian Whitmanite friend, Dr. R. M. Bucke, whose book *Cosmic Consciousness* (1901) was inspired by a visit to the Bolton group. Bucke placed Wallace in the category of "lesser, imperfect and doubtful" instances of cosmic consciousness, a ranking he shared with Moses, Isaiah, Socrates, and Swedenborg. Wallace later linked his illumination to religious experience:

By religious experience I mean that opening of the spiritual senses, and consequent recognition of spiritual realities as of supreme and transcendent importance, and of one's unity with the race, which, when it happens to a man, so completely revolutionizes his whole outlook on life and all his desires and aims as to amount to a new birth. It

is the appearance within himself of a new centre of consciousness dominating all the rest, and gradually bringing them into ever closer harmony with itself. (Wallace, "Walt Whitman and Religion," lecture delivered to Progressive League, Bolton, March 28, 1915)

Fred Wild noted the effect of Wallace's illumination following his mother's death—an inward change, "a steady calmness and air of peace" coming over him. These experiences led Wallace into a deeper study of eastern religion, and he shared with Whitman and Edward Carpenter a familiarity and fascination with the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Wallace's earlier statement that the group could discuss any subject freely and frankly was a bit disingenuous. There seem to have been very strong disagreements in the group over socialism, which led to the departure of a few of the peripheral members. We have already seen that the three main figures in the group were, by the 1890s, active socialists. So too was Wentworth Dixon, who also was affiliated with the Labour Church, which had been formed in 1892 at the Duke's Alley Congregational Church. This irritated Tories like R. K. Greenhalgh and liberals like Ferguson. Wallace wrote a long letter to the group on January 6, 1893, in which he touched on the controversial issue:

I am very well aware that our discussions of "socialism" have been distasteful to some of our members who are rather hanging back in doubt as to where we are going to, and what they are likely to be committed to—and it is also felt that a series of debates on economic questions . . . are not so helpful to individual members as some of our meetings in the past have been, in so far as they resulted in increased faith in the unseen and in contented acceptance of cheer.

Wallace calls for an open expression of differences which will, he is confident, strengthen rather than weaken the group, which is bound together by comradeship and love: "I wish for our college to stand for a higher ideal [than socialism, individualism, etc.], for aspiration towards a more useful and developed manhood, hospitable to ideas and to persons, warmly aiding the right and forever presenting comradeship and affection to each other." Wallace adds that he believes that democracy (the working class) was making rapid strides to power—"as inevitable as gravitation"—but offers a word of warning: "Unless the democracy is wise and religious there must necessarily be many evils resulting from its too early arrival at supreme power":

We are charged by profoundest and divine call of selection to minimize these dangers and to see to it that the greatest birth of time is indeed beneficent. For *we* are the heaven-appointed preachers to the democracy of England! *We* stand in closest relation to Walt Whitman—the divinely inspired prophet of world democracy. *To us* the leaders of English democracy will look more and more for spiritual sustenance.

This somewhat unusual letter is not as absurd as it may at first seem; Wallace is saying something fairly sensible even if his expression is sometimes hyperbolic. Socialism was making giant steps forward, and anyone at the time could be forgiven for believing that a socialist government would soon be formed. However, unless the movement was underpinned by the Whitmanian values of love, comradeship, and non-violence, the result might be what later emerged in Russia and elsewhere. Wallace saw his role, and that of the group, as the spreading of the Whitman message throughout the socialist movement, particularly to its most influential leaders. Bolton, in Wallace's formulation, was to be the ethical heart of British socialism.

When Wallace moved to Adlington (about five miles from Bolton) in the early 1890s, the regular Monday evening sessions came to an end, though the group still met frequently at the houses of Wild, Johnston, Dixon, or Hodgkinson. The group often traveled to Adlington to see Wallace, and the move appears to have left the group intact.

Whitman Day

The major event on the Bolton Whitmanites' annual calendar was May 31, the anniversary of the poet's birth. The first Whitman birthday celebration took place in 1885, with a small gathering at Wallace's. Birthday greetings were sent to Whitman, extracts from his work were read, and a tea party followed. The occasion became more elaborate as the years went on, with celebrations held in the open air of friends' gardens. In the 1890s Fred Wild, Dr. Johnston, and Richard Greenhalgh were frequent hosts and decorated their gardens with Whitmanesque lilac blossoms. Later, the celebrations were held at Rivington (near Adlington), in the garden of Rev. Thompson, the Unitarian vicar, or at the home of John Ormrod at Walker Fold. Edward Carpenter became a frequent visitor and recorded his impressions in his autobiography *My Days and Dreams* (1916): "I have mentioned Walt Whitman more than once in the foregoing pages and I think I ought to not let this chapter pass without referring to the ardent little coterie of Bolton, Lancashire, who for many years celebrated his birthday with decorations of lilac boughs and blossoms, songs, speeches and recitations and the passing of loving cups to his memory."

Carpenter was a close friend of the group from 1892 onwards; other honored guests included Keir Hardie and Katherine and John Bruce Glasier. Alice Collinge, a Bolton poet and socialist-feminist, became a member of the group through the Labour Church and recalls the Whitman Day celebration as a much needed rest from the turmoil of suffrage demonstrations and Labour Church activity: "As a counter attraction to those hectic days, there was the restful contemplative influence of the Whitman Fellowship behind it all, and in that influence

alone I owe an eternal debt to Bolton. To hear the late J. W. Wallace read a paper on Whitman, in a Whitman atmosphere, either at Rivington, Walker Fold, or The Haulgh, was a perfect inspiration and one of those special privileges one cannot account for" (Collinge, autobiographical notes, Bolton Library).

The Whitman Day celebrations always included the reading of messages from absent friends—North American friends like Traubel and Bucke, Whitman scholars like Léon Bazalgette, exiled Whitmanites such as William Atkinson of Midhurst (who supplied the lilacs) and, when they were unable to attend, socialists like Caroline Martyn, James Sims, Keir Hardie, Katherine Glasier, and Edward Carpenter. Wallace invariably read a prepared address on some aspect of Whitman's life and work—the "Calamus" poems, Whitman and religion, or a particular poem. The last paper he gave, in 1925, had the title "If Walt Whitman Came to Walker Fold."

When Carpenter wrote of the ritual "passing of loving cups" in Whitman's memory at these celebrations, he was referring to a specific cup that had been Whitman's own. Whitman's American friend J. H. Johnston of New York presented the cup to the Bolton group in 1894. American visitors to the celebration were not uncommon, and in 1913 J. W. Lloyd of New Jersey was the guest. Allen Clarke describes that particular day of celebrating "the great American singer of comradeship and immortality": "It was May 31st but we had rain and thunder that day—and then sunshine. But we enjoyed 'the glee some saunter o'er fields and hillsides' and after a tour of Lever Park . . . we had tea at the foot of the Pike in the old manse of the Rev. S. Thompson, our genial Scotch host" (Clarke, *Moorlands and Memories*). A report of the day's events was made by Dr. Johnston and published in a newspaper: "As the party afterwards walked homewards through the quiet lanes and fields in the beautiful evening light, the calm atmosphere, the rich and pensive colouring of the sunset clouds, 'the slumbering and liquid trees,' and the far-stretching landscape all seemed as if pervaded by a brooding Presence, infinitely poignant and sweet, responsive to their mood, and crowning with a fitting finale the day's celebration."

The Whitman Day celebrations continued long after the deaths of both Wallace and Johnston. The people primarily responsible for its continuance seem to have been Minnie Whiteside, William Broadhurst, and John Ormrod, at whose home they were often held. They lasted well into the 1950s.

Visits to Whitman

The visits of Dr. Johnston and Wallace to Whitman are well documented, though still not well known outside of Whitman scholarship. The extensive correspondence between the Bolton group and Whitman

began in 1887, with a birthday message and a gift of money. The first visit from a Bolton disciple took place during July and August of 1890, when Dr. Johnston came to America. He kept a detailed record of his conversations with Whitman and records Whitman's greeting: "That must be a very nice little circle of friends you have at Bolton. . . . I hope you will tell them how deeply sensible I am to their appreciation and care for me; and I should like you to tell all my friends in England whom you come across how grateful I am, not only for their appreciation, but for their more substantial tokens of goodwill" (Johnston and Wallace, 36). Johnston met with Whitman several times during his stay and also visited numerous Whitman "shrines," including his birthplace at West Hills. He also met close friends of Whitman like Herbert Gilchrist and Andrew Rome. The experience was a memorable one for the doctor, and his visit led to long-lasting links with American Whitman lovers.

The occasion of the second visit began with the arrival in England of Whitman's close friend and biographer, Dr. R. M. Bucke, who visited Johnston for a few days in July 1891 and brought a message from Whitman for the Bolton group: "What staunch tender fellows these Englishmen are! I doubt if a fellow ever had such splendid emotional send-back response as I have had from these Lancashire chaps under the lead of Dr. J and JWW—it cheers and nourishes my very heart. If you go down to Bolton, and convenient, read publicly to them the last five or six lines as if from my living pulse." Bucke strongly urged Wallace to return to America with him—as Horace Traubel had already suggested. Bucke left Bolton to spend a few days with Tennyson, then returned with Edward Carpenter on August 24, 1891 (this was Carpenter's first meeting with the Bolton group). Whitman readings, walks around Rivington, and night-long discussions followed. Wallace abruptly decided he would go to America and sailed a few days later from Liverpool.

Wallace's impressions of Whitman were recorded with the same kind of loving detail that marks Johnston's memoir. On Wallace's arrival at the Whitman household, Whitman greeted him with the words, "So you've come to be disillusioned have you!" Wallace did in fact later confess that he had not found what he had expected. Rather than meeting a towering, majestic figure, here was "an infirm old man, unaffectedly simple and gentle in manner, giving me courteous and affectionate welcome on terms of perfect equality, and reminding me far more of the common humanity found everywhere rather than suggesting any singular eminence or special distinction." Much of their chat was commonplace, interspersed with comments on other writers, the state of America, and the activity of the Bolton group. Wallace stayed with the Traubels, becoming intimate friends with Horace and Anne. He visited other Whitmanites such as Gilchrist, Thomas Harned, and Joseph Fels, the rich socialist soap manufacturer.

Upon Wallace's return to England, the correspondence with Whitman increased, in spite of Whitman's deteriorating health. On February 6, 1892, the poet wrote to Johnston that he was "deadly weak" but was still able to announce the publication of the 1892 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, for him the definitive version of his book. He ended by sending his thanks—"may be [my] last"—to the Bolton group. However, he wrote the following day: "Same cond'n cont'd—More and more it comes to the fore that the only theory worthy of our modern times for g't literature, politics, & sociology must combine all the bulk people of all lands, the women not forgetting—But the mustard plaster on my side is stinging & I must stop— Good bye to all—" (*Corr* 5:276). Traubel kept Bolton informed of the poet's deteriorating condition, and he was instructed by Whitman to send his best wishes, adding "I am no saint. Don't let our Bolton fellows tumble into that bog." He died on March 26, holding Traubel's hand.

Whitman's regard for the Bolton group has seemed odd to many commentators. Traubel recorded a conversation between Herbert Gilchrist and Whitman, in which Gilchrist said, "It surprises me that you should be so taken with those Bolton folks—they're not famous in England at all." Whitman caustically replied: "It surprises you does it? Well I've had my bellyful of famous people! Thank God they're just nobody at all, like all people who are worthwhile" (*The Conservator*, March 1918). For Whitman, the Bolton group represented "the common people" whom he aimed at, despite the fact that there were actually very few manual workers among them. None of the group had literary pretensions, however, and most held mundane clerical jobs. Whitman was genuinely delighted to have their support, which he believed in some way compensated for his lack of recognition among most American workers in his lifetime.

The Bolton-America links forged in the 1890s remained strong up to the late 1950s. Although Horace Traubel died in 1919, Anne Traubel maintained her contacts with the Bolton group, remaining especially close to Minnie Whiteside. On July 5, 1953, she wrote to Minnie: "as our precious day approaches, I write these few words to bring us nearer to each other and to refresh our thoughts in the sunshine of unfolding love." In the 1930s, several Whitman scholars, such as Professor W. S. Monroe, visited Bolton and were entertained by the surviving Whitmanites. John Burroughs and Clara Barrus also came over to speak in Bolton, at St. George's Congregational Church. Verne Dyson of the Walt Whitman Birthplace Association wrote to Minnie Whiteside on June 14, 1959: "We think of you often—you and your rich memories of the past, so full of recollections of Walt, Wallace and other members of the blessed circle, blessed and eternal."

Spreading the Gospel

The visits to and correspondence with Whitman did give the Bolton group a certain status and authority within some parts of the labor movement. However, Wallace had to work very hard at convincing the great socialist figures like Blatchford and Hardie that this American poet had something important to offer. The Bolton group's own socialist politics were formed in the early 1890s as the Labour Church and Independent Labour Party (ILP) established themselves in the town. James Sims was the central figure in the Labour Church and became the movement's national president; he was a good friend of Allen Clarke, who often came to the meetings. William Broadhurst was an important later member of the Whitman group, and he described how he first met the Whitmanites at Bolton Labour Church:

Membership in it was not dependent on any declaration of faith. It had no set theological tenets. The service consisted of a recital of the Lord's Prayer, the singing together of some democratic songs, called hymns, and a lecture by some man or woman who was in the vanguard of democratic thought. . . . Fred Wild and Wentworth Dixon were active members and one Sunday evening, lo! Wallace was there. Sims introduced me and I passed into the shelter of Wallace's wing. (Broadhurst, address delivered at Swan Hotel, December 6, 1930)

Alice Collinge was another especially important later member of the group who first came into contact with the Whitmanites at the Labour Church. In her autobiographical notes, she records her debt to Sarah Reddish for introducing her into socialist activity and recalls how "the socialism of *that* day claimed me" (her italics are significant). She mentions how, in her "humble role at the piano" she heard "such people as Mrs. Despard, Margaret Macmillan, Edward Carpenter, Mrs. Bruce Glasier" and others.

Charles Sixsmith came into contact with the Bolton Whitmanites in the early 1890s through socialist activity. He was employed at Bentinck Mill, Farnworth, and eventually became managing director. He was a major figure in the Independent Labour Party and later in the Bolton Clarion Cycling Club. He lived at Brownlow, Adlington, from 1908 on and was elected a rural district councilor in 1910, eventually becoming chairman of the council in Chorley.

Carpenter and the Bolton Group

Edward Carpenter was the first major socialist figure whom the Bolton group met, in 1891 (on the occasion of Bucke's second visit to the group during his trip to England). Wallace, Johnston, and Sixsmith visited Carpenter for a weekend at his home at Millthorpe, in the hills above Sheffield, in August 1892. They spent the weekend talking, walk-

ing, and listening to Carpenter playing Beethoven sonatas on the piano. An interesting exchange about socialism took place between Wallace and Carpenter at that time:

Referring to socialism I said that I accepted and rejoiced in the socialistic spirit, but that I could not accept socialism as a formula, as a theory of government. He [Carpenter] said that strictly speaking that was his own case too, he was more of an anarchist than anything else as regards government. But, one could not rest in abstractions. To descend into the practical arena it was necessary to work with people whose opinions differed from one's own. (Wallace, notes of a visit to Edward Carpenter, August 13-15, 1892)

Carpenter was a frequent visitor to Bolton, often speaking at the Labour Church and combining this with a visit to the Bolton group. He wrote to Wallace on March 28, 1894, for example, saying he was giving a lecture in Bolton on "The Future Society" and would call.

Dr. Johnston and Charles Sixsmith became particularly close friends with Carpenter, both spending holidays abroad with him and his lover George Merrill. Johnston visited Millthorpe frequently in the 1890s, and his diary records animated discussions on socialism, spiritualism and mysticism, sexuality, and clairvoyance. Sixsmith began visiting from about 1898 onwards, becoming a lifelong friend of both Carpenter and Merrill; he supported Carpenter when he was being hounded by a local bigot, a certain O'Brien who attempted to stir up feelings about Carpenter's homosexuality. Sixsmith also acted as secretary for Carpenter's seventieth birthday celebration. For his part, Carpenter found the Bolton group a bit odd, unsure whether or not they were socialists. He greeted them on one occasion with the words: "I have seen a lot of your society for some years and I have seen a good deal of societies of the socialistic order and coming here tonight it makes me feel that there is something at work here. I do not know whether you embrace the socialist ideal or not but I feel that your spirit is in essence the same as theirs" (undated, probably around 1900). Carpenter did more than anyone in Britain to spread Whitman's poetry and ideals, and he did recognize the role of the Bolton group, despite their eccentricities: "If there was a somewhat Pickwickian note about its revels still no one could doubt the sincerity of its enthusiasm. It helped largely to spread the study and appreciation of Whitman's work in the north of England" (*Days and Dreams*).

Katherine Conway and Bruce Glasier

Katherine Conway was one of the most popular figures in the early socialist movement and was especially close to the Bolton Whitmanites. Her first contact with the group was in 1893 when she came to speak at the ILP's newly opened "Labour Institute" on Bowker's Row; her topic

was “Liberalism—True and False.” Dr. Johnston recorded in his diary for March 10 that she “made a marvelous speech, interspersed with readings from Whitman.” The vote of thanks was moved by Whitmanite Sam Hodgkinson who had recently joined the ILP ranks. The college gave her an escort to the station—Wallace, Johnston, Wild, Hodgkinson and Greenhalgh. After her departure Wallace was misty-eyed about her: Johnston records him saying: “Well, I’ve had a thoroughly happy day—she is a splendid woman and the communion with her is such as she is the best sermon in the world.” Katherine was soon in regular correspondence with the group, particularly with Wallace, from her home in the short-lived socialist colony at Starthwaite Mill, near Kendal. In May 1893 she wrote to the “Dear comrades” at Bolton: “That is his word, Walt Whitman’s, and I use it fearlessly. As I understand it, like the disciples of old, you are meeting together after the death of him you know as your leader, that you may strengthen each other’s faith in his gospel, gain a fuller understanding of its vast issues and learn together how best to send it forth to the nations.” Katherine’s association with Bolton continued until her death in 1950.

Katherine married John Bruce Glasier—probably second only to Keir Hardie in the ILP leadership. Though Wallace seems to have been personally hurt by the marriage, it was also a good opportunity to further spread the Whitman gospel, and they eventually became close friends. Through Glasier, Wallace became an influential figure in the ILP and addressed several ILP conferences about Whitman’s ideas. In Katherine’s obituary for Wallace, in *The Labour Leader*, she wrote: “Bruce and I, and Keir Hardie, and most itinerant ILP lecturers have known and stayed in his home since 1892. [H]e had a wonderful power of sustaining sympathy. He always knew when Keir or Bruce were in a tight place in the fight, and his letter never failed to come with just the right message of cheer” (*Labour Leader*, January 1926). Others acknowledged how Wallace’s home was used as a sort of socialist convalescent home for weary “itinerant ILP lecturers”—though perhaps Minnie Whiteside provided more of the nursing than Wallace. In the 1900s Wallace sided with Glasier and Hardie as well as Ramsay Macdonald in their attempts to steer the ILP away from an alliance with the Marxist Social Democratic federation, and towards the non-socialist trade union leaders. In a revealing letter to Glasier on February 15, 1909, Wallace urges him to stick to his editorship of *Labour Leader* despite attacks from ILP members who were “untypical” of the majority: “The typical ILP socialist is very different from the rest . . . he is usually a worker in contact with the actualities of working life and their divine lessons, combining idealism with practical sagacity and with sympathetic appreciation of different points of view, with broad humanity, unselfishness . . . and people of this type are exactly those who cannot fail and do not fail to recognize the qualities of your work on ‘The Leader’.” Wallace com-

pares Glasier to Abraham Lincoln—“personally degraded and vilified”—and then Wallace attacks the SDF in terms that had by then become familiar in the ILP:

Sincere in their way, narrow, intolerant, unregenerate, selfish, repellent. Socialism will never come from them. Second [speaking of those who oppose Glasier], folks who accept socialism as a theory, but whose desire for its violent proclamation and partial realization is curiously proportioned to the absence of its real spirit in themselves, and to whom it is simply an offset to the tedium of conventional lives spent to worldly and selfish ends.

In the latter category he includes the *Clarion* readers from whom he once expected so much. The letter is a sad commentary on the journey of ethical socialism from the idealism of the 1890s to the practical social reformism and compromise of the 1900s, despite Wallace’s hopes of *The Labour Leader* “organising the movement to practical ends and setting it marching to its destiny” through a coalition of trade unionists and socialists.

By 1919 it was clear that Glasier was dying of cancer. Wallace was deeply upset and helped him through his last months with letters and Whitman poems—including “Death’s Valley.” His final demise in 1920 led to greater contact with Katherine and a much stronger political correspondence between the two. The experience of the First World War had pushed both of them further to the left, and, as we shall see, Wallace and Katherine formed that part of the ILP which supported the Russian Revolution in opposition to Philip Snowden and Macdonald.

Robert Blatchford

We have seen how Robert Blatchford in 1895 regarded Whitman as one of the central influences on northern socialism and also Wallace’s dismissal of “Clarion socialism” by 1909. This is probably a reflection of Blatchford’s own political instability—only a year before he would be hailing Whitman as the “trumpet-tongued titan” of democracy, he was suggesting to Wallace that he had not even read Whitman’s work:

Thank you very much for the Whitman book. I have not had time to read it yet and God knows when I shall. There is so much to do and I seem to get drawn deeper and deeper by the drift of the tide of politics. . . . Here am I as much adrift as a cork in the river. I have no idea where fate shall carry me. Bah! all imagination! all idle moping and sentimental nonsense. But some things we know are real. The ugly things are real. The slums, the sweaters, the factories and mines . . . and so the dog comes back to his kennel and growls and shows his teeth as duty bids. (Blatchford to Wallace, August 23, 1894)

Wallace’s reply, on receipt of Blatchford’s letter, advises him to marry his concern for social evils with an idealism derived from Whitman’s message of comradeship:

Your dissatisfaction for yourself—as of a dog growling in a kennel—is due to your growing need for, and reaching towards, “the word final,” the “key,” the solution to your problems. If only I could convey it to you. . . . Your work (noble as it is) for what you foolishly call “the real things” (as if they alone were real) will be better done: for, in addition to its devotion and comradeship, it will be filled with infinite hope and unshakeable peace.

Wallace met Blatchford in Bolton the following week, at a concert arranged by Allen Clarke; relations improved and Blatchford “adopted” Whitmanism, as we saw in his piece “The New Religion In the North,” twelve months after the correspondence with Wallace. The cause of Wallace’s dislike of Blatchford in later times, as evidenced by his letter to Bruce Glasier in 1909, was probably some combination of Blatchford’s increasing jingoism, which lost him many friends (including Allen Clarke), and his own blend of “materialism,” which discounted the spiritual realm which Wallace saw as crucial. For Blatchford, Whitman was just a good poet; for Wallace, he was the prophet of a new era. However, Blatchford’s espousal of Whitman in the 1890s—when he was at his peak of popularity and *The Clarion* was read by tens of thousands—must have led many socialists to Whitman’s work. Wallace was very likely responsible for this.

Caroline Martyn

Caroline “Carrie” Martyn was a revered figure in northern socialism in the 1890s; many who heard her speak recalled an almost religious inspiration. She was naturally inclined to the semi-mystical works of Whitman and became a close friend of the Bolton group before her sad death in 1896. This description of her speaking at the Bolton mill village of Eagley captures the impression she made on many:

In company with some two or three hundred people I listened to an exposition of socialist principles, illustrated with the sayings and doings of the Carpenter of Nazareth. My wonder at what seemed the intrepidity of a young and defenseless woman turned to amazement at myself that I had never seen things in this light before. She had spoken as no woman had ever spoken before in my hearing. Scales fell from my eyes, and ere long I was a socialist. (Lena Wallis, *The Life and Letters of Caroline Martyn*)

Allen Clarke also remembers her with affection, speaking on the sands at Blackpool, “her voice by the blue sea in the sunshine of a golden day, pleading for the fallen, forsaken and oppressed.” Her association with the Bolton group began in 1893. She stayed at Wallace’s on several occasions, and her love for him is evident in a letter written on July 6, 1894, while she was living in Newton Heath, Manchester; the letter also indicates the strain she was under at the time, with speaking engagements at Ashton, Salford, Tottington, Manchester, and Farnworth, in less than a week:

The knowledge of your recollection and brotherly love is a very real help to me; your letters, your expression of true sympathy are a tonic. I hope and believe I am doing very practical work for the cause of our prophet [Whitman], that the reforms I advocate the ideals I so feebly teach are the same that he would advocate today. . . . I came home from the lecture very, very tired and am writing in order to settle my nerves before I try to sleep. Whitman's teaching has brought me not the capacity to love, but the strength to express it. I do not suppose that I am separate from you. I am no more myself than you are.

Two years later she was dead—from an attack of pneumonia suffered while she organized the women jute workers in Dundee. Her last surviving note to the Bolton group was written on August 18, 1895, and anticipates some of the semi-mystical strains within modern feminism while it also echoes Whitman's worship of motherhood: "Only the universal love of the mother-heart can compass the world's woe, only the all-embracing tenderness of the mother-voice can soothe the world's sorrow, only the all embracing sympathy of mother-care can provide for the world's needs. The world shall be saved by its mothers."

Keir Hardie

Wallace badgered Keir Hardie into being a Whitmanite—a role he eventually accepted with enthusiasm—and he visited the Bolton group on several occasions. The correspondence began in 1892, when Wallace dispatched copies of *Leaves of Grass* to the great man. Hardie made an evasive reply on December 29, admitting a certain fondness for the poet but noting that his reading-time had been limited. The two men were temperamentally suited to each other, and they became good friends. In a letter written on December 24, Hardie almost breaks out of his usual Scots dourness: "Thanks for your letters. It is not mine to make a show of my feelings, and for that reason am supposed to be void of them. If I don't reciprocate in words your kind message, it is not that I don't appreciate it."

Like Glasier, Hardie got Wallace's support in his fight against the ILP left in the 1900s; Hardie was perhaps less committed to the compromising policy that Macdonald was pushing and still less keen on parliamentary life, as suggested in a letter to Wallace on House of Commons notepaper, sometime between 1900 and 1902: "oftener than once I have been on the point of applying for the Chiltern Hundreds [i.e., resigning] and having done with it. At such times I make for the country and try to gather fresh courage. To resign would be so misunderstood and might do much harm." In the Whitman collection in Bolton Library are numerous other letters from Hardie, giving an insight into this revered figure of the labor movement—such as the note from his home in Cumnock: "I have been in the garden all day weeding and hoeing.

The song of the birds is in my ears and some of nature's music in my soul."

Wider Contacts: John Addington Symonds and AE (George Russell)

In addition to corresponding with leading figures within the British labor movement and with the American Whitman comrades, the Bolton group were in touch with kindred souls in other parts of the world. Chief among these were John Addington Symonds—the British classics scholar who made Davos, Switzerland, his home—George Russell, better known as AE, the Irish writer and mystic.

Both Johnston and Wallace corresponded with Symonds as part of an international Whitmanite circle which included Horace Traubel in America; Carpenter, Johnston, and Wallace in Britain; and others like Havelock Ellis who were involved in sexual research. Symonds was himself a homosexual who nonetheless lived a "normal" married life. On December 19, 1892, he wrote to Wallace about his almost completed *Walt Whitman: A Study*; in the letter, he refers to a prosecution against a homosexual in Bolton and asks Wallace for information on it. One of the documents Symonds uses in his *Study* to document Whitman's homosexuality is the photograph that Dr. Johnston took of Whitman with Warren Fritzingler on the Camden wharves during Johnston's visit to the poet. Symonds's correspondence with the Bolton group continued right up to his death in April 1893; one of his last letters was a note to Wallace on the publication of his *Study*.

AE was a later contact, and it is unclear how the correspondence began. We do know that Wallace had an interest in Irish politics, and AE was probably especially attractive on account of his socialist mysticism. The first surviving letter from AE was written on August 27, 1919, and is about "Irish bibliophiles." Later letters, written during the War of Independence, express AE's support for Irish freedom, coupled with his desire to see a democratic and nonsectarian independent republic. During the war, AE saw many of the "co-operative creameries he had pioneered razed to the ground by the Black and Tans," and he was able to reflect to Wallace on April 21, 1921, "Too many sensations destroy one's sensitiveness, and the horrible thing happens that we begin to regard shootings, raids, wreckings, burnings, all as normal." As the War dragged on, AE put his hopes in Michael Collins and a negotiated settlement with Britain based on the Treaty of 1922. Instead, Collins was shot, and a bloody civil war followed. AE wrote an open letter in which he tried to overcome the post-treaty bitterness but admitted defeat: "I am afraid we are in for a bad time, but we shall climb out of it. I never lose faith in the Irish genius, but it has to be educated, and that takes a long time" (letter to Wallace, June 4, 1923). The correspondence be-

tween AE and Wallace provides a fascinating glimpse of Ireland struggling to free itself from British rule, and the problems it found itself in after the signing of the treaty—in particular the starvation of cultural life in the late 1920s as a conservative government joined forces with the church to stamp out anything remotely controversial.

Personal Relations

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the Bolton group was the intensity of their personal relationships; in an age when men were expected to make little show of their feelings toward each other, the Bolton group espoused love between men. Six years after Wallace died, Anne Traubel expressed to Minnie Whiteside her belief that “the college has been unmatched in my experience as a centre of love and comradeship.” Nearly forty years earlier, Wallace had written to his friends about the basis of the group: “Let no man hang back in dread or doubt! . . . it is for us to do as Walt did—to proclaim that man includes all distinctions and diversities—that brotherhood and comradeship applies to all men . . . that love binds all and that God lies hid in the heart of the meanest” (letter to Eagle Street College, January 6, 1893). Wallace is talking about more than just being good friends. At the 1923 Whitman Day Celebration, he takes the “Calamus” poem as his theme. He insists that “the love of comrades” which Whitman celebrates represents “the deepest assurance of spiritual life and immortality.” He continues:

It is obvious that the love of comrades is vitally different from the tepid feeling that passes for friendship. And the love of comrades is immeasurably more than the mere desire for companionship in hours of leisure or recreation. It is the vital and enduring bond—deep as life—which unites kindred souls on their road to God in co-operation for ideal ends. (Whitman Day Address, May 31, 1923)

Dr. Johnston was equally interested in the themes of “manly love” in “Calamus.” Between 1890 and 1893, he was in regular correspondence with Symonds, who found specific expressions of this love with Swiss peasants and a Venetian gondolier. Writing to Johnston on January 12, 1891, he asks: “I wonder what more the ‘Calamus’ contains, whether the luminous ideal of chivalry based on brotherhood and manly affection will ever be realised.” For Symonds this ideal excluded women by definition. In a letter to Carpenter, a feminist and homosexual, he suggested that women should be restricted to rearing children and doing household chores. Wallace himself has little to say about women, unlike his idol who, unusual for his time, usually makes it a point to refer to both men and women. Wallace’s housekeeper, Minnie Whiteside, was in a directly subservient role, and without her he couldn’t have functioned as he did.

It is idle to speculate to what extent Wallace and other members of the group were practicing homosexuals—clearly a lot of their activity was based on a more or less sublimated homosexuality, even though many of them were married. They accepted Carpenter's open relationship with George Merrill in a way that many socialists at the time did not. On Wallace's first visit to Carpenter, he commented on Merrill, finding the "young fellow" "simple, natural, gentle, a compositor on 'The Weekly Telegraph,'" and noting that "it was pleasant to observe the perfectly free, simple and affectionate relationship between Carpenter and him" (notes of a visit to Edward Carpenter, August 1892). Johnston, in a later visit, describes Merrill as "deeply in love" with Carpenter and "womanly as any woman." The doctor records his amusement at Merrill's jealousy for his lover, which sometimes "reached the point of hysteria."

On a visit in 1898, Johnston discussed the question of homosexuality with Carpenter and the prosecution case over sexual reformer Havelock Ellis's book about male homosexuality: "[we] discuss Ellis' 'Sexual Inversion' and legal proceedings. He is intensely interested in the subject of 'sexual inversion,' so am I. I think he likes to get me to discuss the subject as there are so few with whom he can do so." In this 1898 diary entry, the words "so am I" have been partially erased, so perhaps Johnston was thinking of covering his tracks.

Sixsmith, who accompanied Wallace and Johnston on the first visit to Carpenter, is the most clearly bi-sexual member of the group. He was married and had children, and he outraged his neighbors by making love in his garden. However, in an undated letter to Carpenter (probably from the late 1890s), he expresses some of the emotional dilemmas of a respectable young man who was more than a bit unsure of his feelings:

Yes dear friend, I do at times feel very restless, with an aching longing after something, and a feeling of great loneliness. I have many sad, sad, days, fretful (even to the point of tears). . . . I could give all for something my heart craves, which I get many glimpses of, but no full response. You are surely right—love is what life is for. . . . But my love affairs have broken down and I have not found the true mate. Women attract me, and yet full intercourse has not satisfied me, and I prefer the company of men, and can be attracted to them also. But really I am the greatest puzzle to myself, a bundle of paradoxes and contradictions.

Sixsmith had an affair with Philip Dalmas, a young American who stayed with Carpenter in 1894. Dalmas was credited with mystical power—he could hear flowers and identify colors from musical sounds. In a brief note dated December 25 [1894], he wrote Sixsmith, "I love you very much dear boy." He adds some disparaging remarks about Wallace and ends: "Much love to you Charlie, Ever your true, Phil D." What is striking about the correspondence between members of the group is

their demonstratively affectionate terminology and frequent signing of letters with “much love,” “with deepest love,” etc., terms which even today many men feel uncomfortable using in letters to other men.

Wallace and Katherine Glasier

Wallace was close to Katherine Glasier for many years; he seems to have fallen in love with her at their first meeting in 1893 and wanted her to become some sort of “spirit wife.” In the end, to Wallace’s annoyance, she opted for a more conventional relationship with Bruce Glasier. Wallace wrote her an irate letter which caused her to complain to Bruce: “I think Whitman would have horse-whipped him for his letter to me this morning. Oh Bruce—if I had gone into slavery with him, and then met thee!” (quoted in L. Thompson, *The Enthusiasts*). After the initial recriminations, however, friendship was re-established, though on a less intense level until Bruce’s death in 1920. The relationship was both emotional and political; Wallace and Katherine both became concerned at the rightward drift of the ILP in the 1920s under Snowden and Macdonald.

In addition to her lecturing activities for the ILP, Katherine became editor of *The Labour Leader*, the ILP’s paper, after Bruce’s death. In 1916, Wallace strongly backed her in her support for the Dublin Easter Rising—a position many in the ILP balked at—and congratulated her on her strong writing about the topic: “The paragraph on Ireland is . . . first rate . . . in its praise of the high dedication of brave hearts who have died for Ireland, in its reference to the damning poverty and degradation of the workers of Dublin . . . [and to] the economic conditions which are the real cause of the unrest which will yet issue in revolution. For Ireland still preserves her soul inviolate—as England and Scotland do not.” (The final sentence refers to English and Scottish involvement in the War and in the suppression of the Rising.)

A year later, Russia was in the throes of revolution, and the ILP enthusiastically supported it—at first. As the going got rough, however, Snowden became violently anti-Bolshevik. Wallace remained unflinching in his support, though, and wrote to Katherine on December 30, 1918: “My own opinion is that Russia is the standard bearer of a new democratic advance of incalculable value to all the world.” Katherine shared Wallace’s pro-Soviet stance and became increasingly concerned at Snowden’s attacks. The crisis point was reached in the 1920s, when British forces were poised to invade the Soviet Republic. Snowden submitted a particularly virulent piece to the *Labour Leader*, which in effect supported the intervention. Though Katherine was editor, Snowden had overall control. The article went in, but Katherine added a dis-

claimer. There was the predictable uproar, and Katherine lost her position as editor. Her diary for April 1920 makes sad reading:

April 6th: Utterly alone at office. Break down and end my Labour Leader days.
April 7th: Go to Macclesfield in despair to tramp with Glen [her son].

By the end of April, she arrived at Wallace's and began a steady recovery from her bashing in the ILP. They went for walks around Rivington and the moors. On April 22, she records having "a wonderful time" with Minnie Whiteside and Glen. During this period at Wallace's she seems to have undergone a form of spiritual renewal akin to Wallace's "illumination" in 1885. On April 25, she wrote: "At last I understand—I know I am deathless." On November 10, she records: "Walk to Lake—I have cosmic consciousness of my own." Her recovery allowed her to get back on the road as a lecturer both for the ILP and the Workers' Educational Association; the visits to Wallace's continued, and they remained "loving comrades" until Wallace's death in January 1926. Wallace's obituary in the *Labour Leader* was written by Katherine and records her debt to him.

Towards the Dawn

Wallace owed a great deal to Katherine Glasier; without her political guidance, Wallace might well have become a mystic crank. Instead, he was able to productively wed his Whitmanism to a viable socialist politics. Whereas many "ethical socialists" such as Philip Snowden ("St. Philip of Blackburn") moved to the right in the complex world facing socialists after 1914, Wallace and Katherine were radicalized further. For both of them, the Irish uprising, Russia, British poverty, and unemployment were part of the world crisis that would be resolved by a socialism based on Whitman's ethics.

Wallace delivered his "last political will and testament" to the Bolton Workers' Education Association on October 16, 1920. He traced the degeneration of capitalist society, and with it the rise of new literary and religious forces—spiritualism, free thought, a new interest in the West for Buddhism, etc. In addition, he saw new political forces arising:

Concurrently with this development there has been a gradual awakening of the democratic spirit amongst the masses . . . the more thoughtful amongst them recognising the injustice and many evils of the system, and uniting in various movements for their removal and for the establishment of socialism, communism or anarchism.

The capitalist class, he believed, would fight tooth and nail to defend their rule and "will stoop to any crime or infamy to gain their predatory ends, even though it may involve the destruction or starvation of mil-



The Bolton Whitmanites at Walker Fold, near Bolton, 1925. Front row: Mrs. Miller, Myra Dixon, Wentworth Dixon, J. W. Wallace, Dr. John Johnston, Nellie Ormrod, Alice Collinge. Second row: Lilian Nightingale, Mrs. Nightingale, Annie Ormrod, Mrs. Bolton, Annie Forshaw, Mrs. Broadhurst, Ms. Broadhurst, Fred Nightingale, Minnie Whiteside, Ms. Farrington. Back row: Elsie Ormrod, Mr. Miller, William Broadhurst, Alan Ormrod, Nellie Ormrod, Fred Wild, John Ormrod, Dr. Broadhurst, Wallace Ormrod.

lions of men, women and children.” Despite the capitalists’ control of the army, navy, air force, police, and the press, a force was arising, as had happened in Russia “in whom they see a spectre tenfold more dread to them than Banquo’s ghost to Macbeth.” Before long, concludes Wallace, democracy and socialism will triumph and Whitman will come into his own:

When human brotherhood and international solidarity are generally recognised—as they will be in the new era towards which we are advancing, even through the wide chaos and numberless miseries of today and the great social convulsions yet to come, Walt Whitman will increasingly be recognised as its greatest pioneer and ever new depths of wisdom and beauty will be found in his “mystic, deep, unfathomable songs.”

Last of the Whitmanites? Death and Rebirth

Wallace’s death removed the fountainhead of the group. Johnston, who had long been an invalid, died a year later in 1927. Fred Wild,

calling himself “the last of the Mohicans,” helped to keep the group together until his death in 1935. However, the spur for continuing the Whitman Day celebration was taken up by Minnie Whiteside, John Ormrod, Alice Collinge, and William Broadhurst. The annual event continued to take place at Walker Fold, at least up to the 1950s. Katherine Glasier kept in touch with the group through Minnie Whiteside and continued to visit her. Both Minnie and John Ormrod kept in touch with American Whitman people—Annie Traubel, Clara Barrus and John Burroughs (up to the 1930s), as well as Whitman scholars like Verne Dyson and Charles E. Feinberg. As various members of the group passed on, Bolton Library steadily built up a Whitman collection second to none in Britain. The libraries of Johnston and Wallace were vast, and most of the material is now in the safe keeping of the Public Library, along with numerous items of Whitmania such as Whitman’s stuffed canary bird and his loving cup. There is also a large collection, from the estate of Charles Sixsmith, in John Rylands Library, in Manchester.

The continuity of the group took a long time to break; probably the death of John Ormrod in the 1960s brought it to an end. The links with American Whitman scholars continued, however, through the Public Library, with fairly regular contacts between Bolton and Duke University and Wayne State University. It is difficult to tell when the last Whitman Day celebrations involving members of the original group came to an end. There is a photograph in the Whitman House in Camden, New Jersey, which shows a Bolton gathering in what appears to be the late 1950s or early 1960s. In this photo, the old open-air eccentricity has been replaced by a post-war domestic scene, with a television set lurking in the background.

Whitman Day was revived in Bolton during the 1980s. A group of people (including Denis and Wendy Pye, Paul Salvesson, Neil Duffield, Eileen Murphy, and Barry Wood) involved in the Bolton Socialist Club and Workers’ Educational Association, encouraged by the staff of Bolton Library, organized a well-attended event on June 2, 1984. During the morning, Bolton’s chief librarian Norman Parker spoke about Bolton’s priceless Whitman collection, and he was followed by local poet and lecturer Geoff Wainwright, who spoke on Whitman’s life and work. Paul Salvesson followed with an outline history of the Bolton Whitmanites. During the afternoon, the party trooped off to the moors by Walker Fold, the old Whitmanite haunt, to hear poetry and listen to a reading of Wallace’s lecture “If Walt Whitman Came to Walker Fold.” At the picnic that followed, many of the participants sported sprigs of lilac on their lapels. The following year Ed Folsom came to Bolton for Whitman Day and spoke about Whitman’s contemporary relevance. Whitman’s loving cup, filled with Sainsbury’s bordeaux instead of the traditional spiced claret, was passed around during an open-air reading at Walker Fold. In 1987, the well-known socialist-feminist Sheila Rowbotham was

guest speaker and gave an open-air talk on Edward Carpenter.

In the late 1980s, Whitman Day in Bolton was once again not regularly celebrated, but now, thanks to the efforts of Don Lee, Gloria Gaffney, and Jacqueline Dagnall, it is once again an annual event held on the nearest Saturday to Whitman's birth. It has kept its eccentric charm and its socialist ties, and it has resisted the temptation to become an academic affair. The Bolton Council has recognized the importance not only of the Bolton Library Whitman Collection, but also of the Bolton group itself. Thanks largely to the efforts of Jacqueline Dagnall, several Bolton buildings with Whitman connections now have plaques commemorating the links. The first plaque went on the site of 14 Eagle Street—now a welding factory, but once Wallace's home and the place the Eagle Street College first met. The second plaque was unveiled on the offices of Bradshaw Gass and Hope, where Wallace worked for many years. Bank Street Chapel was similarly adorned, and three more plaques are about to be put up—at John Ormrod's home at Walker Fold, at Rivington Chapel, and at Bolton Central Library. An illustrated *Walt Whitman Trail* will be published in 1998.

Conclusion

The Bolton Whitman group was a remarkable collection of men and women. They were certainly not typical of the kind of stuffy moralism of late Victorian English society that permeated much of the middle class and much of the labor movement's leadership. Through Whitman's poetry, the Bolton group found strength to express a genuine love for each other in a way seldom experienced today, even within socialist circles. Theirs was a collective love for each other, seldom directed at one individual, but rather shared among several. The success of the group in this respect is proved by the remarkably long friendships that were built—from the 1880s to the 1920s and beyond. Wallace's aim of propagating Whitman's ideals in the labor movement was an ambitious one, and he succeeded to a surprising extent. The socialist movement in the 1890s was certainly far more receptive to a semi-mystical, ethical idealism than at any time since. While Wallace's early formulations of this brand of socialism were sometimes absurd, he was able—as he matured—to more effectively link the need for a socialist society with the Whitmanian themes of love, comradeship, democracy, and nature. After the First World War, however, the tolerance for these sorts of ideas had shrunk. Katherine Glasier was effectively silenced by the ILP leadership, and there were no alternatives outside the party. Certainly the Communist Party, in its blanket hostility to anything that did not have the Comintern seal of approval, would have had little time for either Wallace or Glasier.

The Bolton Whitmanites do, however, still have something to say

to British people today about how valuable, forgotten elements of radicalism in the British heritage can be woven into a larger international tradition. The experience of the Chartist movement in the 1840s and the socialist movement of the 1880s and 1890s are two examples of successful beginnings that deserve more study. The Whitmanites—particularly Wallace, Johnston, and Sixsmith—were saying that state socialism on its own wasn't enough; they wanted a society based on love and comradeship, thoroughly democratic, resistant to all the old ways of thinking and living.

Today, outside of literary circles, Whitman is not well known in Britain. It is heartening to know that a Whitman group is alive in Bolton once again. This group carries on the Bolton tradition of creating interest in Whitman's work locally, but it also dedicates itself to the study of those figures who were first so attracted to Whitman, the early socialist writers—some still well known, like Edward Carpenter, William Morris, Allen Clarke, and the Glasiers, and some forgotten, like Alice Collinge and Sarah Reddish of Bolton, or Caroline Martyn and Enid Stacy. They all have something to offer to Britain at the end of the twentieth century. The Eagle Street College remains in session.

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NOTES

I owe a very great debt to the staff of Bolton Public Library for the marvelous assistance they have given me, far beyond what their job requires. The photographs accompanying this essay are from the Bolton Whitman Collection. I would also like to thank the staff of John Rylands Library in Manchester, Sheffield City Library, Liverpool University Library, *Bolton Evening News* Library, and Ruth and Eddie Frow's Working Class Movement Library in Manchester. I owe special thanks to the Bolton branch of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), who helped in the original pamphlet publication of this work. It is fitting that Bolton WEA has been so closely involved in this project, given the close historical links between Alice Collinge and J. W. Wallace and the Bolton branch of the WEA. Both at different times lectured at the branch, and Wallace's "last political will and testament" was delivered to the Bolton WEA in 1920 and republished shortly after by the National Labour Press.

The manuscript archives I've used for this essay are the Whitman Collection, Bolton Library; the Sixsmith and Whiteside Collections, John Rylands Library, Manchester; the Glasier Collection, Liverpool University Library; and the Carpenter Collection, Sheffield Library. The main textual sources are J. Johnston and J. W. Wallace, *Visits to Walt Whitman in 1890 and 1891* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1917); J. W. Wallace, *Walt Whitman and the World Crisis* (Manchester: National Labour Press, 1920); Caroline A. Eccles, *James William Wallace: An English Comrade of Walt Whitman* (London: C.W. Daniel, 1936); Edward Carpenter, *Days with Walt Whitman* (London: George Allen, 1906); and Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams* (London: George Allen, 1916).