

JOANNA LEVIN AND EDWARD WHITLEY, eds. *Whitman among the Bohemians*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014. xxiv + 254 pp.

If you walked into Manhattan's pub called "The Vault at Pfaff's" at Bleeker and Broadway before it closed last year, you encountered well-heeled young professionals on internet dates drinking \$16 cocktails named "Ada Clare" and "Leaves of Grass"; however, had you strolled into Pfaff's saloon a century and a half ago, you might have encountered New York's first "Queen of Bohemia," Ada Clare herself, along with Walt Whitman and other luminaries, drinking beer and bantering about the latest gossip and buzz about town. Long before the KGB Bar, Studio 54, Andy Warhol's Factory, the White Horse and Cedar Taverns, and the Algonquin Round Table, New York's most significant counter-cultural writers and artists formed what appears to be the city's first European-style salon in a beer hall named after its founder and owner, Charles Pfaff.

Both *Leaves of Grass* and Pfaff's beer cellar first appeared in 1855, though it took Whitman a few years to discover the venue that would become a regular haunt for him during the late 1850s and early 1860s. There, he drank (though apparently never to excess), caroused, flirted, exchanged witticisms, and apparently composed lines for at least one poem, an unfinished portrayal of his fellow patrons entitled "The Two Vaults." Whitman's involvement with the bohemians at Pfaff's has long been known to his reading public, but the scholarly record addressing the subject was notably scant until Christine Stansell explored the topic in a groundbreaking study published in the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* in 1993. Since then, interest has steadily increased, culminating in two major publications in 2014: Justin Martin's *Rebel Souls: Walt Whitman and America's First Bohemians*, an accessible, book-length study aimed at a popular audience, and the subject of this review—*Whitman among the Bohemians*, a collection of twelve scholarly essays edited by Joanna Levin and Edward Whitley.

This impressive volume documents an important period in the lives of well-known figures such as Whitman, Clare, *Saturday Press* publisher Henry Clapp Jr., and controversial stage performer Adah Isaacs Menken, as well as lesser-known Bohemians such as Fitz-James O'Brien, Edward G. P. Wilkins, Ned Mullen, and Elihu Vedder. Many of the articles in the first half of this volume focus on contemporary periodicals important to these and other Pfaffians, especially the short-lived but influential *Saturday Press* and the original *Vanity Fair*, which together referred to Whitman dozens of times in reviews, articles, and satirical pieces, including a fascinating comic poem with an accompanying caricature of Whitman that adorns this volume's cover. The poem, entitled "Counter-Jumps. A Poemettina.—After Walt Whitman," receives insightful treatment from Robert J. Scholnick and separately from Ruth Bohan, whose in-depth analysis shows how the patrons at Pfaff's almost certainly discussed Whitman's new "Calamus" poems in light of their sexual significance. While Scholnick focuses on the many references to Whitman in *Vanity Fair*, where Whitman was mentioned at least 22 times between 1860 and 1863, often in an affectionately satirical light, Bohan focuses mainly

on pictorial representations of Whitman, including a sophisticated analysis of the “Poemettina” image, as well as sketches of the poet preserved in his notebooks from the period. The portrayal that emerges is of a poet intensely aware of his self-presentation, basking in the adulation he received from early New York bohemians, while at the same time asserting his independence from some of the negative implications of bohemian life and contemporaneous formulations of gay identity. Bohan interprets the satirical *Vanity Fair* image of Whitman printed alongside the “Poemettina,” for example, as representing the poem’s author, Fitz-James O’Brien (imaged as a small monkey-like figure), being silenced by Whitman, seen enveloping O’Brien in an enormous flat-brimmed bowler. Bohan’s analysis shows O’Brien keenly aware of Whitman’s self-presentation, as Whitman “asserts his independence” from the poem’s portrayal of a contemporary stereotype of effeminate, likely gay men, namely “counter-jumpers,” or men working as dry store clerks, “an occupation many regarded as unmanly.”

Bohan and Scholnick’s essays are two of many in this volume that offer substantial contributions to Whitman scholarship. Scholnick’s article is reprinted from *WWQR*, as is Amanda Gailey’s “Walt Whitman and the King of Bohemia: The Poet in the *Saturday Press*.” Gailey examines Whitman’s relationship with Henry Clapp Jr., the Manhattan publisher behind the short-lived but influential *Saturday Press*, which Gailey highlights as Whitman’s most important promotional vehicle leading to the publication by Thayer and Eldridge of the third edition of *Leaves*. Her study tracks the voluminous history of Whitman-related publications in the *Press*, as well as Thayer and Eldridge’s intense advertising campaign for Whitman, which for a time helped keep the financially-troubled *Saturday Press* solvent. She provides epistolary evidence that Clapp, not Whitman, composed a well-known adulatory review, resolving a previous critical dispute regarding its authorship. She goes on to explore how his association with the *Press* firmly marked Whitman as a northern poet, as evidenced by critical denunciations of Whitman in southern periodicals, whose authors encountered Whitman not by reading *Leaves of Grass* but through his publications in the *Press*.

Karen Karbiener’s “Bridging Brooklyn and Bohemia: How the *Brooklyn Daily Times* Brought Whitman Closer to Pfaff’s” reviews the competitive history of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* and the *Brooklyn Daily Times* and helps resolve a longstanding debate regarding the poet’s involvement with the *Times*. She provides evidence in support of his editorship, noting that Pfaff’s, which attracted independent Republicans, would have been more accepting of a *Times* writer/editor, was geographically closer to the *Times* office in Williamsburg, and, as a center of emergent Republicanism, provided a community of greater interest to the disaffected Democrat disheartened by the conservative, pro-slavery turn of his former party.

Other studies in this collection also center on the *Saturday Press* and its relationship to Whitman and the development of Pfaff’s bohemian culture. Ingrid Satelmajer observes that the *Press*’s editor, Clapp, was the most frequently published poet in his own publication. She interprets his poetry and the social climate at Pfaff’s as sites for performance and collaboration.

Leif Eckstrom examines the *Press*'s conflicted policy with regard to "puffing"—publishing favorable reviews for financial or practical reasons with little regard for the merit of the work being reviewed. Like Satelmajer, Eckstrom also stresses performance in his approach, arguing that the scandal Clapp created regarding puffing was in effect a "performative fiction" that helped to individuate the *Press* in a saturated media market. Joanna Levin focuses on Ada Clare, Pfaff's "Queen of Bohemia," arguing that she "pioneered new intersections between women's rights and bohemianism," while "redefining both movements in relation to one another." Levin examines Clare's columns for the *Saturday Press* to stress her effective use of humor and bold fusion of a typically bohemian emphasis on passion and sexual freedom with a feminist redefinition of gender difference. Edward Whitley explores the Pfaffian period in the careers of American drama critics Fitz-James O'Brien, Edward G. P. Wilkins, and William Winter, who published satirical and sometimes scathing theater criticism in the *Press*. Reviewing their various relations to Whitman, Whitley stresses how Wilkins used Whitman as a source of cultural authority and a positive example of original and advanced American art, whereas Winter, in contrast, employed Whitman's iconic status as a negative example, an artist who wrong-headedly elevated ordinary sexuality in his poetry. Whitley convincingly backdates Whitman's status as a source of cultural authority to antebellum New York and thus adds to a growing body of evidence that he achieved fame and success earlier than most scholars have believed.

One of the few essays that examines Whitman directly through his writing, rather than through his involvement with Pfaff's bohemians or their publications, is Logan Esdale's "Adorning Myself to Bestow Myself: Reading *Leaves of Grass* in 1860." Esdale notes that the culture at Pfaff's reversed the appraisal of Whitman's staunchest critics with respect to his work's "nakedness" in form and content. Contrasting the notion of "nakedness" with "adornment," Esdale analyzes adornment as a concept that shows "the value of clothes without their function as disguises." He shows how the notion of adornment also includes the body itself, since even "genitals, hair, sweat, and veins" are defined by the poet as "adornment." Esdale argues that for Whitman, "naked and adorned" are "complementary terms," and he stresses how Whitman asks his audience to "both take things off and try things on" as part of a spiritual redefinition of "adornment."

Other essays are less directly concerned with Whitman than with his lesser-known cohorts at Pfaff's. Stephanie M. Blalock reviews Whitman's relationship with his former romantic attachment, Fred Vaughan, and explores the period of time just after Whitman and Vaughan parted ways. She argues that Whitman's increased involvement with the Fred Gray Association, a drinking club believed to have offered intense, playful, and suggestively erotic companionship to Whitman at Pfaff's, was in part a reaction to his estrangement from Vaughan. She goes on to relate Whitman's involvement with Fred Gray and his "Association" to the theory of adhesiveness later advanced in the "Calamus" poems. Eliza Richards addresses the life of the fascinating Adah Isaacs Menken, best known during her lifetime for her controversial, mercurial, and surprisingly erotic stage performances, but who was also a poet whose

posthumously published collection, *Infelicia*, is interpreted as a performance of the failures of communication. Because Menken assumes the necessity of an audience without access to one, she is unable to construct a poetic self, since such an identity for Menken, as for Whitman, depends upon being “absorbed” by an engaged audience. Thus, according to Richards, Menken’s poems are influenced not only by Whitman’s free verse form, as was commonly noted by her contemporaries, but also by his vision of community and of an absorptive selfhood. In the volume’s final essay, Mary Loeffelholz examines “poet, literary journalist, and anthologist” Edmond Clarence Stedman’s role in canonizing Whitman’s poetry and defining him for the American public. Loeffelholz focuses on how Stedman “outs” the Bohemian side of Whitman, and she uses theory by Pierre Bourdieu to articulate how Stedman uses the cultural status of bohemian New York to promote Whitman and at the same time expose subtle hypocrisies in Whitman’s self-presentation. In Stedman’s analysis, Whitman emerges as a canny self-promoter who embraced his own paradoxical status as an ostensibly working-class poet whose actual appeal was primarily to “the over-refined and the doctrinaires.”

Whitman among the Bohemians fills in many key details regarding a period in Whitman’s life for which there has, until recently, been little documentation. It is an important publication for Whitman scholars and a testimony to the powerful influence online archives and periodical databases have had on recent studies. Most of the articles included would not have been possible in their present forms without the existence of a website described as the book’s “digital counterpart,” *The Vault at Pfaff’s: An Archive of Art and Literature by the Bohemians of Antebellum New York* (digital.lib.lehigh.edu/pfaffs), and especially the site’s indexed and searchable archive containing the complete run of the *Saturday Press*. Drawing from this site, the *Walt Whitman Archive*, and others, the work in this collection offers a vivid portrait of early bohemian culture in New York, and most of the articles insightfully relate the material to Whitman, especially in his roles as a self-promoter, emergent icon, and surprisingly cosmopolitan socialite.

As substantial and diverse as this collection is, one subject is seldom addressed, and it is the subject of greatest interest to the majority of Whitman’s readers: his poetry. While a couple essays do address the “Calamus” cluster in general terms, and Gailey presents a publication history of “O Captain! My Captain!,” the only poem of Whitman’s that receives substantial attention is his unfinished and unpublished draft about Pfaff’s. It seems a telling indication of recent scholarship that the poetry of Adah Isaacs Menken receives greater sustained attention in this volume than the poetry of Whitman himself. If the period of time Whitman spent among the bohemians at Pfaff’s is as important as this collection demonstrates, then surely more can be said about how this period helped shape and inform his poems. This lack of specifically literary content, as well as Whitman’s relatively minor role in several articles, may frustrate some readers, but the broad cultural attention paid to Pfaff’s patrons and to contributors to the *Saturday Press* will also render the book of greater interest to readers fascinated by early New York history, as well as those interested in the evolution of American counter-cultures. Greil Marcus

has described the “old weird America” of early twentieth-century musicians and performers, and the term can be equally applied to the much older, yet equally fascinating community of poets, performers, critics, and carousers who frequented Pfaff’s beer cellar before their scene was shattered by the Civil War.

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ED FOLSOM. “Walt Whitman.” *Oxford Bibliographies in American Literature*, ed. Jackson R. Bryer, Richard Kopley, and Paul Lauter. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. oxfordbibliographies.com.

What?! Another bibliography of Walt Whitman?! Don’t we already have excellent ones by Scott Giantvalley for 1839-1939, Donald Kummings for 1840-1975 (and, within the previous spread of years, Evie Allison Allen for 1945-1960, James Tanner for 1961-1967, and William White’s bibliographies in the *Walt Whitman Review* through 1982), Brent Gibson for 1976-1985, not to mention the regular bibliographies in *WWQR* and *American Literary Scholarship*, and, of course, the omnipotent MLA Bibliography? And then there’s the monolithic *Walt Whitman Archive* with its vast searchable bibliography. Well, the answer is “yes,” we do need another, different type of bibliography.

When I started graduate school in the late 1960s, everyone had to create their own bibliographies (unless they were fortunate enough to have had someone do it before them). For Whitman, that meant Gay Wilson Allen’s *Handbook* (1946), *American Literary Scholarship* (which had only begun with the volume covering 1963), and slogging through annual issues of the MLA Bibliography. Now, of course, everything is either on the web or accessible through a database, or so our students would have us believe. Personally, I think bibliographical control today is a lot like the parable of Buridan’s ass, where the hungry and thirsty creature is placed midway between hay and water, and, unable to choose between them, dies of hunger. Today’s researcher (and especially one early in an educational or professional career) begins a topic confronted by multiple piles of bibliographical data and, overwhelmed by the choices and lacking guidance as to their value, intellectually starves by slinking away in defeat, guessing what is worthwhile, or cutting and pasting from Wikipedia.

All of which is to say that Ed Folsom’s *Oxford Bibliographies* annotated guide to a century and a half of Whitman criticism is a most welcome *vade mecum* for the novice and an opportunity to compare evaluations for the advanced reader. After a brief biography of Whitman, Folsom presents sections on General Overviews, Scholarly Print Editions (with sub-sections on *Leaves of Grass*, Early Poems and Fiction, Manuscripts and Notebooks, Nonfiction Writing, Correspondence, Journalism, Comprehensive Reading Editions), Reference Works (General, Bibliographies), Archives, Biographies (General, Family, Friends, and Disciples, Personal Reminiscences), Journals, Reception, Whitman and Other Writers (General, Modern American and British