

HAMLIN GARLAND'S "THE EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN THOUGHT":

A Missing Link in the History of Whitman Criticism

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ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, Hamlin Garland earned recognition from America's leading authors for work that is now virtually unknown. Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, Walt Whitman, George Washington Cable, and Sarah Orne Jewett—to name a few—corresponded with Garland about his public lectures and his promised book on "The Evolution of American Thought." Most of Garland's history of American literature was written in 1886 and 1887, but he lectured on the subject throughout his one important decade as a writer, from 1885–1895.¹ Eventually, Garland's energies were directed elsewhere, and his history was never published. Existing today only in fragments, "The Evolution" is uneven—sometimes derivative, frequently original and insightful.² Perhaps the best section of the work is the self-contained chapter printed below ("Walt Whitman") which sheds light on Garland's literary development and establishes him as a perceptive early critic of the poet.³

Garland was strongly attracted to "modern" and "scientific" systems of thought. At the outset of his career, he was so impressed with Hippolyte Taine's theories regarding race, milieu, and epoch that he etched notes concerning the *History of English Literature* on the walls of his shanty while enduring the Dakota winter of 1883–1884.⁴ After moving to Boston, Garland studied such writers as Eugène Véron, Henry George, Charles Darwin, and Herbert Spencer. Garland first encountered *Leaves of Grass* in 1884 in the Boston Public Library where it was double-starred to indicate restricted circulation. His own sense of the poet's importance was confirmed when he read Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett's *Comparative Literature* (1886), a book tracing the development of world literature from its beginnings to the nineteenth century and concluding with praise of Whitman's "democratic individualism."⁵ From his rapid and wide-ranging self-education, Garland developed a coherent critical system, though his approach was flawed by being somewhat deterministic.

"The Evolution of American Thought" is one of many English and American critical works of the 1880s and 1890s influenced by Darwinian and Spencerian ideas.⁶ Evolutionary critics held that literature grew according to changes in social conditions. Rejecting the standards of earlier ages to evaluate modern literature, these critics asserted that standards should change along with literature. Most evolutionary critics emphasized the milieu as the

determining factor in literary production and dismissed the romantic concept of the artist-hero. However, Garland—while acting on evolutionary beliefs in praising Whitman—nonetheless provides him with a heroic role in “The Evolution of American Thought.” Whitman becomes “the genius of the present.” Evolutionary ideas perfectly suited Garland’s beliefs in progress, the superiority of modern times, and the inevitable advancement of democracy. But Garland’s critical framework also threatened to deprive him, at a crucial stage of his own development, of a hero and literary father. In Garland’s treatment of Whitman, one senses an unresolved tension between his psychological needs and his critical assumptions.

Garland’s first letter to Whitman in November 1886 emphasized the poet’s central place in Garland’s study of American literature:

As the motto page . . . I have used a paragraph from your “Collect” which is entitled, “Foundation Stages—then Others.” . . . One sentence, “*In nothing is there more evolution than in the American mind,*” I have also used in company with Spencer’s great law of progress upon my title page. It helped to decide the title which is: *The Evolution of American Thought*. . . . In the latter part of the volume I have treated of the Age of Democracy and its thought, taking as foundation the splendid utterances of M. Taine upon the modern age. . . .

. . . In conclusion let me say that without any bias in your favor (rather the opposite from newspapers) your poems thrilled me, reversed many of my ideas, confirmed me in others, helped to make me what I am.⁷

Garland informed Whitman that he hoped to publish “The Evolution” in the spring of 1887, but the study continued to grow and change despite his plans.

“The Evolution” flattered both Garland and his audiences by privileging the modern. By 1888–1889, as a lecture circular for this season indicates,⁸ Garland had prepared nineteen chapters, and nearly half of these were devoted to living authors. The two decades from 1865–1885 received as much discussion as the two hundred and fifty years from Jamestown to Appomattox. The first eight chapters of “The Evolution” progress from the colonial age to the Civil War. “The Colonial Phase” is probably the weakest of the extant chapters. The dress of the Puritans, he tells us, “was sombre, their voices nasal and monotonous, their customs grim, silent and sad. Their architecture the most monstrously ugly—frightful in its enormity and incongruity, square, flat, angular, and uncouth.” Even after granting that Garland lacked information provided by modern social historians, it is clear from the tone of this passage that his allegiances to a secular and democratic society left him incapable of sympathizing with the Puritans. He is considerably better with writers active after the Civil War, many of whom Garland knew personally. The title of the ninth chapter marks the crucial shift in the work—“Walt Whitman: The Prophet of the New Age.” The writers and topics treated in chapters ten through nineteen are united in illustrating the impact of democratic principles on American literature. Recognizing this fact, Garland

prepared a new transitional chapter, "The Literature of Democracy," for the 1889–1890 season.⁹ He argues here that Whitman is the "greatest advocate" of democratic ideals, and by placing this chapter just before "Walt Whitman," he reasserted the poet's pivotal role in "The Evolution."

Much of "Walt Whitman" is concerned with answering Sidney Lanier's question: if Whitman is the poet of democracy, why do so few read *Leaves of Grass*? Garland responds with a two-part argument. He first employs a distinction, drawn from Max Nordau and Herbert Spencer, between emotion and cogitation. He argues that traditional ideas arouse the mind to automatic activity and are thus inconvenient and unpleasant for average minds. Garland contends that most nineteenth-century poets continue to use familiar aristocratic conventions. Striving to please their audiences, they arm their heroes with arrows and lances rather than Henry rifles. Whitman, however, deals with the facts of the present, facts that produce "painful associations of hunger, toil, cold, calculation." (Significantly, Garland better describes the effect of his future masterpiece, *Main-Travelled Roads* [1891], than he does *Leaves of Grass*.) Another passage reveals even more clearly that Garland—the apostle of veritism—had identified his own interests with Whitman's:

It now remains for me to make the application, not alone to the claims of Whitman and his evident failure to reach the people, but to the more or less ill favor with which the veritistic school is met, as it attempts to embody the life of to-day. . . . Everywhere there seems to be a wall opposing the advance of the author and artist.

It is because of this identification with Whitman that Garland reversed himself in the second part of his argument and asserted that Whitman was actually gaining followers. Garland believed that Americans, despite the "continually replenished . . . vast streams" of immigrants,¹⁰ would inevitably become more sophisticated with time, and he saw—or hoped until he saw—evidence that Whitman's popularity was steadily growing. Garland's inconsistency on the issue of Whitman's audience results from a mixture of defensiveness and wishful thinking about his *own* prospects. Garland's commitment to what was artistically important struggled against his powerful drive for popular success, a struggle that led eventually to unfortunate compromises with the genteel tradition.¹¹

Garland was by no means the first critic to perceive Whitman's greatness. Emerson had exulted over Whitman as an individual figure; William Douglas O'Connor has placed the poet among the masters of world literature; even the more conventional Edmund Clarence Stedman had granted Whitman equal rights in the pantheon of American poets.¹² "The Evolution of American Thought" is nonetheless remarkable because Garland foresaw the decisive impact Whitman would have on future American artists. In the 1880s—when many people had argued that Irving or Cooper or Emerson himself was the father of American literature—no critic other than Garland

looked ahead to argue that Whitman would influence not only American poetry but also fiction, music, and drama.

When Garland interviewed Whitman in 1889, however, the poet questioned having his work linked to that of "present novelists." Whitman chastized these fiction writers for their "deplorable propensity . . . toward the *outré*"—that is, for dwelling on exaggerated and diseased characters. Whitman felt he knew the American character because of his experiences in the Civil War. He acknowledged that there were isolated cases of distorted, grotesque, and immoral individuals, but he insisted that these

are not the typical men. . . . In all my coming and going among the soldiers . . . I was everywhere struck with the decorum . . . of the common soldier, his good manners, his quiet heroism, his generosity, even his good real grammar; these are but a few of the qualities of the American farmer, mechanic, the American volunteer.

Garland agreed that his fellow writers had a weakness for the abnormal because "the irregular startles . . . makes the greater impression." However, he assured the poet that these novelists were in a "preparatory stage" and that they would achieve "perception of the less obvious."¹³

Commenting on this exchange, Larzer Ziff has asserted that Whitman's idea of character "did not meet Garland's reality" because the midwesterner "sought out ruder and more defeated individuals to embody his theme."¹⁴ But Garland himself agreed with Whitman during the interview, and, more significantly, he concluded "The Return of a Private" by claiming that he had fulfilled Whitman's wish:

Here was the epic figure which Whitman has in mind, and which he calls the "common American soldier." With the livery of war on his limbs, this man was facing his future, his thoughts holding no scent of battle. Clean, clear-headed in spite of physical weakness, Edward Smith turned future-ward with a sublime courage.¹⁵

Like Ziff, Jay Martin has trouble reconciling his own understanding of Whitman's vision with Garland's fiction. Martin argues that Garland must have been sardonic in calling Private Smith Whitman's "epic figure."¹⁶ Yet at this early stage of his career, Garland never spoke facetiously about the poet or his themes. In fact, Garland gave Smith all the qualities Whitman demanded. He is the common soldier right down to his common name. He is one of the "volunteers" Whitman alluded to who has good manners and who demonstrates quiet heroism (though exhausted, he sleeps in a train station rather than a hotel to save money for his family). Far from being derisive, Garland was transforming into fiction his own father's return from the Civil War and trying to see in that return verification of the Whitman vision. Though Smith is described as "pathetic," Garland's remarks about his "heroism" are completely genuine; Smith's physical weakness is meant to emphasize his perseverance and prevailing courage.

In works such as "Mrs. Ripley's Trip" and "The Return of a Private" —returns into personal family history—Garland discovered that the present was not always enough for a practicing artist. He had praised Whitman in "The Evolution" for poetry based on the present, but he found he had to modify his aesthetic principles to meet his working needs in *Main-Travelled Roads*. Garland's history of American literature was also a testing ground for more general ideas, including that of evolution itself. In the history, evolution leads to an unremitting optimism, but in *Main-Travelled Roads* Garland used evolution in a manner more consistent with his sense of the drudgery and bleakness of midwestern farm life. The struggle of life can border on hopelessness as Garland made clear in "Up the Coulé":

What was it worth anyhow—success? Struggle, strife, trampling on some one else. . . . The hawk eats the partridge, the partridge eats the flies and bugs, the bugs eat each other and the hawk when he in his turn is shot by man.¹⁷

Evolution requires death as much as it insures melioration.

In writing his history of American literature, Garland sharpened his craft, refined his ideas, and created the need (at least in his own mind) for his greatest work. Beyond its immediate significance for Whitman scholars, "The Evolution" can be thought of as an extraordinary "Preface" to *Main-Travelled Roads*, an attempt to describe the law of progression that made the sort of fiction Garland valued both inevitable and indeed the culmination of American literature.

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WALT WHITMAN¹⁸

PART X

If asked to name the most significant and characteristic work published by an American in the last fifty years, there are not a few critics who would reply "Walt Whitman's 'Leaves of Grass.'" In it is the spirit and prophecy of the modern, the incarnate spirit of democracy. It is full of light and heat, electric, virile, rugged. No other book ever put forth in America can compare with it in these regards. To say nothing of the literary side of the question, the personality of this writer is surpassingly great, human, and magnetic.

The supreme movement of the age—nay of *all* ages has been the rise of the people, the growth of the average personality and the widening of sympathy. These great forces seemed to rise beneath the French Revolution like

the tide which follows an earthquake and was felt in all parts of Europe and in England. In America the movement toward liberty and fraternity was less convulsive but none the less sure and majestic.

But in America with very much less of opposition, even on the part of the conservative element advances in altruism and individuation have been almost inconceivably rapid; indeed the chosen work of American civilization would seem to have been to set free the boundless aspiration of common men. Nevertheless, unparalleled as this advance has been on the American soil, and significant as such work is, very few of our literary men have been in full sympathy with it. It [has] been the hope of our conservatives that the American public will become a sedate well-groomed public and take kindly to reprints of the English classics. Therefore [they] have constituted themselves a body apart from the people, taking little share in their affairs, having little sympathy with the life or the needs of the vast and heterogeneous masses of work-a-day Americans. As would-be leaders they have set their faces in the wrong direction.

Professor Dowden writes, "They formed a little paradise of European culture and delicatessen [apart] from the howling wilderness of Yankee Democracy — from the vital breath and touch of the land, the wind of free untrodden places, the splendor and vastness of rivers and seas, the strength and tumult of the people. Until of late indigenous growths of the New World were either shy or insolent."¹⁹

These facts are now pretty generally admitted by those who think, and an occasional heretic utters a warning word. Our authors, they say, have not been without imagination but it was an imagination whose materials were drawn from second and third hand sources, from the writings of other lands and times, rather than from actual experience and fresh observation.

The novelist, the artist, the poet had not the emotional conception — if the wish — which made it possible for him to write of the real and present, but preferred — and was in a sense forced to write in fear of the past or at least in awe of the aristocratic party in literature, whose aims are in general to exclude the present and to conserve that which is old. They did not welcome change unless it were to return to the rare old days long gone. They clung to inheritance and its associations, used courtly terms, were sticklers for purity in the use of English — in short they formed a powerful reactionary element in American society, a rock in the midst of the Democratic millions rushing in a fierce devouring flood into the future.

But all this formed a condition which could not last. The originality so long confined to industries and journalism, began to spread into the higher departments of American life and more than all at last found its poet, its great advocate and special pleader in Whitman the word-compelling prophet of democracy, the first in point of time and all things considered the greatest leader the new dispensation has produced.

I hasten to say that by the term poet of democracy, is not meant that Whitman is the poet most in the hands of the farmer or blacksmith. Considered from that point of view he has failed—he is too great, too revolutionary to be at once comprehended by the masses. He treats in large measure of abstract themes, themes which require thought in the reader. Furthermore these themes are as yet unpoetic to most of readers because they retain more or less of disagreeable or prosaic associations. He is the poet of the engine rather than of the steed, the tools of the mechanic have replaced the glaive, the morion and the lance. He is deeply emotional but his emotion arises from the contemplation of the actual, the present and the common.²⁰

When we say Whitman is the poet of Democracy, we mean that he is the representative democrat as over against the aristocrat, that he adjusts new values to modern life. Says Professor Dowden, "His poems are such as naturally arise when a man of imaginative genius stands face to face with a great democratic world as yet but half-fashioned such as society is in the United States at the present day."²¹ Whether he is read or not this is true of him. *He is the genius of the present.* He presents a modern view of the world, and represents the highest conceivable present idea of individuality and altruism. He compels thought; he challenges comparison.

With such words as these following in the line of great criticisms dealing with Whitman as the great American poet, American critics but display their unreasoning prejudice when they put aside with contempt the claims of a most remarkable man and thinker. The greatest European critics have all been quick to acknowledge his power. It is of no value to measure him by the past for he has repudiated its right to bind or in any way direct him; he must be measured by the broadest of principles and deductions.

Let us face at this point the objection so often urged with telling force, not only against Whitman's poetry and Howells's novels, but against the whole range of modern art.²² This explanation is vital and bears directly upon all future art as well. In order to explain at all adequately it is necessary to dip a little into the psychological and to consider the differences between thought and feeling, cogitation and emotion. Cogitation is the vital activity of the highest centres of consciousness. An activity comparatively slow, painful, which continually forms new combinations of the data given by the senses. It is the activity which distinguishes the adult and well-equipped individual from children, or those whose mental processes run in hereditary grooves. The cogitational states, as Mr. Spencer writes, have to do with the *relations* of things, while the emotional states are those modes of mind not occupied by the relations existing between our sentient states but *with the states themselves.*²³ The emotional activity is largely automatic and vague and massive because largely hereditary, whereas cogitation is more largely individual and sharply defined.

The average of men *feel* more than think, their centres of consciousness

work more automatically, representing such combinations as are already organized. "Emotion," writes Herr Nordau upon this point, "is therefore that which is inherited. Emotion is the vital activity of the race, cognition, the vital activity of the individual. — Emotions notwithstanding their vagueness are subjectively more agreeable than cognitions."

This is so for several reasons. First being organic it is easier, a less expenditure of nervous force being necessary to direct an automatic activity through combinations already established, than by conscious, free activity. "In the second place the inability of the consciousness to see what takes place in the centres which work automatically—it tries to picture what it can not see distinctly, that is the activity known as imagination and is pleasurable."²⁴ In the third place as Darwin and Spencer both advance,²⁵ the most important activities are those most frequently practiced and which are as a rule most important for the preservation of the individual and the race. These of course must be apprehended as pleasurable.

Now the opposite of all these are characteristics of cognition or cogitation. It is not pleasurable, because it is difficult and inconvenient for the average mind. It does not allow of the delightful play of the consciousness which is known as the imagination. "And finally it does not at first sight appear to be necessary to the organism and must have time to demonstrate that fact. *In this latter case it soon becomes organic and is transformed into emotion.*"

"These suppositions throw light on a number of obscure phenomena. The romantic school, which prefers the old to the new and considers the middle ages more poetic than our own times, which raves over a ruin and calls a building, adapted to its purpose and in good repair an abomination, this school has its roots in the fact that the old traditional ideas arouse the centres to automatic activity and consequently are apprehended as emotions while the novel ideas, not yet organic, require an effort of consciousness to apprehend them and thus produce cogitation."

In this sentence the reader will find the solution of many an artistic mystery. At first sight it would seem that the objects or ideas apprehended as agreeable should be pleasant as regards their essential nature, but this does not seem to be necessarily true of the old. As for example we take a strange delight in visiting a dungeon or in looking upon a ferocious pair of forceps once used in pinching the flesh from screaming captives. We shudder but we are pleased. So in plays, in the stories of war, etc. Things most painful in their essential nature give rise to an agreeable humor.

"Thus," Nordau goes on, "the old stage-coach aroused emotion in those who last used it, the railroad cogitation"—(the coach was "poetic," the railway "prosaic"). "The whole of poetry is based upon this radical difference between emotion and cogitation. The subject of poetry is general human relations and circumstances and passions; that is, frequently repeated organic activity become automatic." Music relies upon still deeper-rooted general emotions—conceptions too vague for words.

Poetry is therefore “produced by emotion and arouses emotion. Even in expression it retains the old ideas necessarily—for this reason the poet still alludes to spirits, fairies and gods. For this reason he still arms his heroes with the arrow and lance instead of Henry rifles. For this reason he still anthropomorphizes nature and the affections. For this reason his heroes and heroines still proceed from place to place on noble steeds instead of taking the sleeping car. For this reason he retains all the crude conceptions of a more primitive civilization.”

“Poetry has nothing to do with modern ideas. It does not feel at home in the views and institutions of to-day which are not emotional but cogitational. —*But the transition from cogitation to emotion will soon follow as a thing of course*”—observe this well.

A thousand years from now a railway station will be as poetic as a ruined castle is to-day, a Krupp gun will be as poetic as a lance—for we must not forget that this old-fashioned paraphernalia of poetry was one time fully as new, that is as cogitational as are the railroads and modern arms and science now. At that time the castle on the peak, the knightly armor, were as prosaic and matter of fact as a shooting box and jacket to-day.

If you consider for a moment you will see that this must have been so. “Each age looked back to the preceding age as the poetic age, much in the same way that a man of fifty looks back upon the days of his boyhood. To the middle-aged even the most austere and painful experiences of youth, with the passing of the years take on a strange charm, while the things of the present and near at hand, because cogitational and associated with toil, danger, suffering, are considered prosaic, possessing utility not beauty.”²⁶

I have quoted as much of this remarkably fine study made by Herr Nordau, because of its very great general value and because its central idea has the widest and most important bearing upon the literature of democracy. It now remains for me to make the application, not alone to the claims of Whitman and his evident failure to reach the people, but to the more or less ill favor with which the veritistic school is met, as it attempts to embody the life of to-day, that is in their attempts to emotionally conceive and state present American actualities in terms of the novel, drama and poem, as well as in the arts of music, sculpture and painting. Everywhere there seems to be a wall opposing the advance of the author and artist. We are now ready to understand the barrier.

First it may be said that it requires not only a comfortably situated mind but a highly developed mind to be able to see beauty and deep significance in the present. The average man lives almost wholly in the past, so far as his emotional life is concerned. That is, the inherited activities make up the larger part of his life; even the philosopher when sick or aged withdraws into that region and approaches the child.

So of a people it looks upon its past as the golden age coming to ap-

prehend as poetic finally those things which were once associated with toil and hunger and mental discomfort. It follows therefore that the "popular" poet must play mainly upon those experiences and emotions which have become organic in his reader, using song to add still more to the vague and pleasurable, for song plays almost wholly upon the unconscious, does not create but arouses.

Returning now to the anomaly of the poet of democracy, apparently cast out by the very mind's souls to whom he addressed himself, we shall find nothing illogical or mystic in the situation. An inexorable law of the human brain has kept Whitman from the very democracy he loved and sang for. The tendency of the modern American poet and novelist who is truly original, I hope to show is toward having more and more to do with modern American facts, and this was powerfully promulgated by Whitman thirty years ago, and in another form by Howells during the last 30 years.

These poetic and dramatic attempts are not universally well received and Sidney Lanier brought the popular indictment against it when he said: "The test of Whitman's poetry is this, if it is the poetry of Democracy why do not the people read it?"²⁷ Adding that Whitman was [read], like Wordsworth, only by the most cultivated and philosophic of minds rather than by the common people.

Whitman deals wholly with conceptions and relations which are new, and, not yet poetic in the average mind, and of things more or less disagreeable because of painful associations of hunger, toil, cold, calculation. His emotion is that of a highly developed mind facing the present; capable of being exalted by scenes, ideas and essences which have as yet no esthetic value to most men. He is capable, indeed, of emotionally apprehending objects utterly prosaic even disgusting to the average reader—a steam engine, a ferry-boat—he is too individual to be representative.

Longfellow, on the other hand, is a popular poet for the reason that he treats of the old, the widely known, themes automatically apprehended as poetical by every reader. He retains all the recognized paraphernalia of rhyme and tender epithet which Whitman wholly cast out. He imparts the castle, the steed, the lance, and uses simple, lucid, long-familiar verse form, easily co-ordinated, whereas the wild free music of Whitman is confusing and disappointing.

There is almost nothing of the traditional in Whitman. He casts out all epithets, tricks and graces of the poet and deals with the facts, powers, incidents of every day life. His soul leaps forth in song when standing before the most commonplace event because his far-seeing eye notes its deep significance. All is miracle with him, *the true has become the beautiful in his eyes*—and yet just in proportion as he does this does he cut himself off from the people.

It does not matter to him that to his reader the facts, tools, occupations,

which he uses are prosaic. He recognizes no vulgarity, no prosaic associations. He has gone beyond that; if we stick there he can not help us. He tells no story, sings no ballads, composes no drama.

Thus it will be seen that there is nothing incongruous, at the last analysis, in the fact that while treating of the life and ideals of the democratic public Whitman fails to be apprehended as its poet.

It is clear that the average mechanic cannot recite the "Song of Occupations"; only the most imaginative have felt the power of this singer of Vistas. Each year his conscious and unconscious followers increase in numbers. Today he is almost a fashion. To be a follower of Whitman let me say does not mean writing in his manner nor the exploitation of his peculiarities. "He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher." *It means to have a like faith in the modern man and in his future. It means possessing the same healthy, sane balance of mind and body, the same sunny philosophy which makes pessimism a disease, and above all to have the same love for men as men, and the same appreciation for the common things of the present, undaunted by the vulgar words and stern realities of our day.* These are attributes which every poet of Democracy must possess in some unusual degree. He must delight in the vast streams of human life flowing round him like a sea. He must face the dawn and rise above every dark doubt. He must face trouble as did Whitman himself with level serene brows, careless of what comes provided the common man is enriched.

To arrive at once to the central doctrine continually and everywhere insisted upon by Whitman, we may say that the present assumes almost inconceivable grandeur to him, a grandeur and depth of meaning which imparts the most marked and absorbing significance to what seems mean and trivial.

Of these years I sing,
How they pass and have passed through convulsed pains.
How the great cities appear—how the Democratic masses
turbulent wilful as I love them,
How the whirl, the contest, the wrestle of evil with
good, the sounding and resounding keeps on and on.
How society waits unformed and is for a time only
Between things ended and things begun,
How America is the continent of glories
And of the triumph of freedom and Democracies
And of the fruits of societies and of all that is begun.²⁸

America, inheritor of the past, is also custodian of the future and great as are the past and the present Whitman looks out on a still grander vista.

Years of the modern, years of the unperformed
Your horizon rises—I see it parting away for more august dramas,
I see tremendous entrances and exits,

I see new combinations, I see the solidarity of races,
I see freedom completely armed and very haughty,
With the law on one side and peace on the other,
A stupendous trio all issuing forth against the idea of caste.
I see this day the *people* beginning *their* landmarks
All others give way.

*Never was average man his soul more energetic, more like a God.*²⁹

Here again we meet with the poet's tremendous faith in the human soul — in the common man. He hates class distinctions. He looks up to no one and at the same time looks down on no one. Neither will he look upon men in masses: every man is divine.

Painters have painted their swarming groups
And the central figure of all,
From the head of the central figure
Spreading a nimbus of gold-colored light,
But I paint myriads of heads
And paint no head without a nimbus of gold-colored light.³⁰

He sees each soul isolate, intact, no matter how low, insignificant to others, none ever fail of his love and sympathy. "I will be the bard of personality," he says in one place, and in another he breaks forth:—

Underneath all individuals,
I swear nothing is good to me now that ignores individuals
The only government is that which makes minute of individuals,
The American compact is altogether with individuals,
The whole theory of the universe is directed to one
single individual—namely to you.³¹

It follows naturally from his love and admiration of the present that he should be first of all a realist. He believes that all American art and literature should be founded upon the actual, the present and should be in harmony with the modern. He epitomizes America in a singular degree. He spent a third of a century studying men and their occupations and wove them into a vast song, as turbulent, as heterogeneous and as full of faults as the life from which it sprang. He was a product of his day and the quality of his work might have been foretold in generations. Forty years ago M. Chasle prophesied of this singer in such words as these:

"In America the poetry of vengeance could not arise, the primitive liberty of nature, the great struggle with the elements, did not permit the literary imagination to take that bitter and fearful flight, nor to be hateful and violent. *The American by the freshness of his pictures, by the buoyancy of his hope* is to gain the ear of the world. He is destined to add new themes to the literature of his race. Countries grow old in sorrow, they have bought ex-

perience dear. Not a castle whose walls are not blood-stained whose legends do not tell of murders."³²

If an American poet does not add something new to the literature of his race, he is not worth the name. America's poet must sing of a new dispensation.

In one of his poems Whitman says that what is most lacking in the past marks perhaps the substance of the future. Feudalism is passing away but its literature is being perpetuated even by the poets of the republic. The time has come for a new art, a new literature which shall have to do with the ideals of the American people, touching their lives at every point. What is done is done, why should we attempt to do it over again? he asks. "Let the ages and wars of other nations be chanted and their eras and characters be illustrated and that finish the matter. Not so the Psalm of the Republic here, the theme is creative and has vista."³³

In the preface to the edition of 1872 he writes, "I will not therefore conceal from any person known or unknown to me who take an interest in the matter, that I have the ambition of devoting yet a few years to poetic composition. *The mighty present age!* To absorb and express in poetry any of it—of its world—America—cities and states, the years, the events of our Nineteenth Century, the rapidity of movement, the violent contrasts, fluctuations of light and shade, of hope and fear—the entire revolution made by science in the poetic method. —These great new underlying facts and new ideas rushing and spreading everywhere—truly a mighty age! *As if in some colossal drama*, acted again as those of old, under the sun, the nations of our time, and all the characteristics of civilization seem hurrying, stalking across, flitting from wing to wing, gathering, closing up toward some long prepared most tremendous denouement. . . . To me the United States are important because in this colossal drama they are designed to play leading parts for many a Century to come."³⁴

Away with themes of war! Away with war itself!
And in their stead speed industry's campaigns,
With thy undaunted armies engineering,
Thy pennants, labor, loosened to the breeze,
Thy bugles sounding loud and clear.

Away with old romance.
Away with novels plots and plays of foreign courts.

To you ye reverent sane sisters,
I raise a voice for far superb themes for poets and our art,
TO EXALT THE PRESENT AND THE REAL.
*To teach the average man the glory of his daily walk and trade.*³⁵

In these lines and especially in those which I have emphasized, is the trumpet call toward new and limitless fields of conquest. The *idealization of the real* not only underlies the whole theory of Whitman but also underlies and supports whatever is best and most enduring in every art now beginning in America.

Moreover, throughout Whitman's work, either expressed or implied, is the belief that what is now considered coarse and common will one day be found sweet and dear. That the growing fund of associations of comfort, tranquility and love, will one day make our present coarse surroundings as mellow and poetic as an old homestead with its hoarded memories of dear faces and voices.

Do you seek afar off?
You surely come back at last,
 In things best known to you finding
 The best or as good as the best.
In folks nearest you finding the sweetest, strongest.³⁶

He is then a realist and at the same time he is the greatest of idealists. He denounces³⁷ and uses the real as the basis for the projection of the ideal. He is master of the real, nothing daunts him. The mud and slush in the street, the gray and desolate sky, the blackened walls, the rotting timbers of the wharf—the greedy, the ragged, the prostitute—vulgarity, deformity, all—no matter how apparently low and common, his soul receives and transforms into sweeping, mighty song.

Where the city's ceaseless crowd moves on the livelong day
Withdrawn I join a group of children watching
By the curb-stone toward the edge of the flagging,
A knife-grinder works at his wheel sharpening a great knife,
Bending over he holds it to the stone by foot and knee,
With measured tread he turns rapidly,
As he presses with light and firm hand,
Forth issue then in copious golden jets
Sparkles from the wheel.
The scene and all its belongings how they seize and affect me,
The sad sharp-chinn'd old man with worn clothes
And broad shoulder-band of leather;
Myself effusing and fluid, a phantom
Curiously floating, now here absorbed and arrested—
The group, an unminded point set in a vast surrounding,
The attentive quiet children, the loud, proud, restive
 base of the streets,
The low hoarse purr of the whirling stone,
The light pressed blade,
Diffusing dropping side-ways darting in tiny showers of gold
Sparkles from the wheel.³⁸

As he walks the streets his eye seeks and measures the meaning of such scenes as this. His boundless sympathy and love for humanity make him the poet of all the despised and outcast of the world. Most men see poetry in the abnormal, in the shadowy, in the past; Whitman sees it in the sunlight of today. There is as great mystery in the regular and the law-abiding, in the noonday as in the midnight.

“Why who makes much of a miracle?” he cries scornfully. “As for me I know nothing else but miracles.”

Whether I walk the streets of Manhattan
Or dart my sight over the roofs of the houses toward the sky,
Or wade with naked feet along the beach,
Or stand under trees in the woods,
Or watch honey-bees busy around the hive of a summer fore-noon,
Or animals feeding in the fields,
Or birds, or the wonderfulness of insects, in the air,
Or the wonderfulness of sundown,
Or of stars shining so quiet and bright.

To me everything of light and dark is a miracle
Every cubic inch of space a miracle.³⁹

The civil war was a great school for him, and his record of it [is] without a parallel. And to the sickness brought on by nursing we owe some of the most powerful and passionate studies of nature ever written.⁴⁰ He stood for a new and direct poetry of the landscape. He led and emphasized the reaction from the cold and formal study of nature of the transcendental school, to the passionate appreciation of the modern poet, to the cosmical conception. He had the prodigious faculty of reproducing all of a picture from nature. He surrounds the reader with the sights and sounds of a landscape. He is not engaged in the discovery of the Divine in Nature, he does not moralize, he does not tell you that he is moved. He was a part of nature. You find that in the sweep of the prose or verse.

He was for evolution. “The zones of light march!” he cries. Human nature is forever changing, never stationary. Shakespeare uttered [a] certain phase of his time and passed away, Dryden, Pope, Thomson, uttered songs or embodied ideals suited to their times, and died. They were suited to their time but they have very slight and imperfect connection with our age. As they uttered their ages, so must we utter ours, no other age or people can do it for us. The developed types now on the globe now in America, differ from any others ever seen on the earth and there are untracked domains of human passion opening up to the eye of the original thinker and men are finding this out.

Man is higher than nature, nature has no meaning aside from its human associations. Humanity is grander than the sea, more mysterious than the

stars. No flower is so beautiful as the face of a woman; no gulf so profound as the brain; no river so sublime as the vast streams of men and women rolling along the street of our swarming cities. *Humanity is the final study of the painter, the poet, the philosopher, and to which they must all return at last.*

These are a few of the great thoughts which stream like electrical currents throughout all the poems and prose of this great and impassioned thinker. "Keep your splendid silent sun," he cries, "but as for me, I plunge into the midst of the oceanic American life with all its pageants, possessions, faces, passions, hurrying to and fro for gain or pleasure."⁴¹ Humanity is a never failing source of emotion with him.

Unlike the landscape school just named, who wished to get away from humanity and especially the poor and the "vulgar," and to set up a little kingdom of select subjects, finding more in a mink or a jay-bird than in a poor or diseased man—unlike these he wished to touch the masses at all points and continually. He admired beauty, strength, health inexpressibly, but none ever fell too low for his sympathy.

It remains to say that Whitman has no sense of humor in the study of men. His terrible, his earnest eyes see all of man, all the dread significance of being, and his profound experiences of life and death in the war and elsewhere made him grandly sympathetic but not humorous. He occupies moreover the highest and most abstract range of thought in the main part of his writings, and enunciates rather than exemplifies. He does not essay the dramatic, he is speaking from his own centre.

Nevertheless with all his mistakes and all his limitations he is the enunciator of the deep-laid principles by which American art and literature are conformed, and is incontestably the most powerful and original poet yet produced in America and merits the name the "Prophet of Democracy," to whom he says:—

Sail, sail thy best ship of Democracy,
Of value is thy freight, 'tis not the present only
The past is also stored in thee,
Thou holdest not the venture of thyself alone,
Not of the Western continent alone,
Earth's resume entire floats on thy keel O ship,
Is steadied by thy spars.
With thee time voyages in trust
The antecedent nations sink or swim with thee,
With all their ancient struggles martyrs, heroes, epics, wars,
Thou bearest the other continents,
Their's, their's as much as thine the destination-port triumphant.
Steer then with good strong hand and wary eye
O helmsman, thou carriest great companions,
Venerable priestly Asia sails this day with thee
And royal feudal Europe sails with thee.
Beautiful world of new superber birth that rises to my eyes

Like a limitless golden cloud filling the western sky.
 Thou wonder world
 How can I pierce the impenetrable blank of the future,
 I feel thy ominous greatness evil as well as good
 I watch thee advancing, absorbing the present
 Transcending the past,
 I see thy light lighting and the shadow shadowing
 Scattering for good the cloud that hung so long
 That weighed so long upon the mind of man.
 The storm shall dash thy face
 The murk of war and worse than war shall cover thee all over
 In many a smiling mask death shall approach thee
 Thou in disease shalt swelter,
 But thou shalt face thy fortunes, thy diseases,
 And surmount them,
 While thou, time's spirals rounding out of thyself
 shalt soar toward the fulfillment of the future for such
 unparalleled flight as thine, such brood as thine.
 The future only holds thee and can hold thee under
 the rule of God to be a rule unto thyself, thy peerless
 natal stars set in the sky of law.⁴²

The final mixture and solidarity is inevitable. The Hoosier, the Creole, the Negro, must melt into the *American* and while the average of personality will become higher and higher, the differences in individual inner life more marked, the externals of dress, speech, social forms, will grow more uniform and conventional.

If it were true then that Democratic ideals are gaining the ascendancy in the modern world, if it be true that they are impressing themselves upon the literature and art of America by the two-fold process of producing and demanding; if it be true that Whitman has more or less fully expressed the growing power of this Democratic spirit, then we shall find the trend of this movement, growing more marked, more widespread, more masterful in each year which adds its length to our intellectual development.

It will underlie and direct the novel, the drama, music and all the fine arts, for America as I conceive it is but another term for Democracy, its literature in the long run must be *for the average man* and must keep in the main that level. And finally from the cosmical view all of American life, its wars, measureless energies, inventions and conquests, its corruptions, apparent failures, crudities and gross appetites, are but the results of the rising tide of the average personality, the growth of American minds in altruism and in heterogeneity of powers. That the struggle has been thus fierce prolonged is due to the constant dispersion of our social units and to the vast immigration evermore rolling in upon us, bringing the squalor, the brutality, and the low individuality which the past produced and which the present more or less militant feudalism of Europe has maintained.

That a new era dawned for North and South at the close of the war it is the design of the following pages to show.

HAMLIN GARLAND

NOTES

1 Correspondence to Garland about "The Evolution of American Thought" and the work itself can be found in the Hamlin Garland Papers at the University of Southern California library. I would like to thank Dr. Robert Knutson, Head of the Department of Special Collections, for his generous help and Constance Garland Doyle for permission to publish Garland material, and Patricia L. Repka for assistance in locating and analyzing Garland materials.

On the complicated question of dating "The Evolution," see Donald Pizer, *Hamlin Garland's Early Work and Career* (1960; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1969), pp. 176-177 n. 20.

2 Eight complete chapters are extant: "The Colonial Phase," "The Revolutionary Age," "The First Age of the Republic," "The Literature of Democracy," "Walt Whitman," "The Epic of the Age," "The Present and the Future," and "Logical Prophecy." Part of a chapter concerning Bret Harte and Joaquin Miller also survives.

3 For studies of the Whitman-Garland relationship, see B. R. McElderry, "Hamlin Garland's View of Whitman," *Personalist*, 36 (1955), 369-378; Nancy Bunge, "Walt Whitman's Influence on Hamlin Garland," *Walt Whitman Review*, 23 (1977), 45-50; and Thomas Becknell, "Hamlin Garland's Response to Whitman," *The Old Northwest* [Oxford, Ohio], 7 (1981), 217-235. These studies have merit, but they ignore "The Evolution" and unpublished correspondence from Garland to Whitman.

4 This anecdote is mentioned in John Perry, *James A. Herne: The American Ibsen* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1978), p. 81.

5 For a discussion of Garland's reading in the 1880s, see Pizer, *Hamlin Garland's Early Work*, pp. 9-16.

6 See, especially, two essays by Donald Pizer, "Evolutionary Ideas in Late Nineteenth-Century English and American Literary Criticism," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 19 (1961), 305-310 and "Evolutionary Literary Criticism and the Defense of Howellsian Realism," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 61 (1962), 296-304.

7 Transcribed from Garland's letter of 24 November 1886 in the Feinberg-Whitman Collection, The Library of Congress. The complete letter is printed, somewhat inaccurately, in Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, 2 (1915; rpt. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1961), 160-162.

8 The circular is reproduced in Lars Ahnebrink, *The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), pp. 440-441.

9 Garland did not advertise "Walt Whitman" among his lectures for 1889-1890 (lecture circular in the Feinberg-Whitman Collection, The Library of Congress). However, it would be wrong to assume that he had rejected his chapter on the poet. "The Literature of Democracy" refers to and builds toward "Walt Whitman."

10 "The Literature of Democracy."

11 See Claude Simpson, "Hamlin Garland's Decline," *Southwest Review*, 26 (1941), 223-234; Bernard I. Duffey, "Hamlin Garland's 'Decline' from Realism," *American Literature*, 25 (1953), 69-74; and Pizer, *Hamlin Garland's Early Work*, pp. 159-166.

12 See Emerson's famous letter of greeting to Whitman in 1855 in *Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Collected Prose* (New York: The Library of America, 1982), p. 1326; O'Connor, *The Good Gray Poet* in Jerome Loving, *Walt Whitman's Champion: William Douglas O'Connor* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1978), pp. 157-203; and Stedman, *Poets of America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1885).

13 "Whitman at Seventy," *New York Herald*, 30 June 1889, p. 7.

14 *The American 1890s: Life and Times of a Lost Generation* (1966; rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p. 101.

15 *Main-Travelled Roads*, ed. Donald Pizer (Columbus, Ohio: Bobbs Merrill, 1970), pp. 214-215.

16 *Harvests of Change: American Literature 1865-1914* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 127.

17 *Main-Travelled Roads*, p. 108.

18 This text is based on Garland's typescript with holograph alterations in blue pencil and, in one case, black ink. Garland's infrequent misspellings and grammatical lapses have been silently corrected. Garland was extraordinarily sloppy in quoting Whitman's poetry. Indeed he was so inaccurate that he sometimes appears to be rewriting *Leaves of Grass*. Because scholars may find these misquotations to be meaningful, Garland's alterations of Whitman's wording and line arrangement have been reproduced.

19 Edward Dowden, *Studies in Literature* (1882), rpt. in *Walt Whitman: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Milton Hindus (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 143. The bracketed word was supplied by Garland.

20 Garland may be thinking here of a passage he read in his copy of Richard Maurice Bucke's *Walt Whitman* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1883), p. 66. Garland drew a pointing hand next to a remark Bucke attributed to Whitman: "The emotional element . . . is not brought to the front, not put in words to any great extent, though it is underneath every page. I have made my poetry out of actual, practical life, such as is common to every man and woman, so that all have an equal share in it" (University of Southern California library).

21 Dowden in *Walt Whitman: The Critical Heritage*, p. 146.

22 In the left margin, at the start of this sentence, Garland has written "cut." However, since there is no indication of what specific words, sentences, or paragraphs he meant to cut, nothing has been excised.

23 Garland read Spencer's *The Study of Sociology* in preparation for writing "The Evolution of American Thought." He also seems to have known Spencer's *First Principles, Education, Man Versus the State* and perhaps *Social Statistics*. See Pizer, *Hamlin Garland's Early Work*, p. 177 n. 22.

24 Max Nordau, *Paradoxes*, trans. from the German (Chicago: L. Schick, 1886), p. 139.

25 Garland read Charles Darwin during his period of self-education at the Boston Public Library. See Pizer, *Hamlin Garland's Early Work*, p. 8.

26 Nordau, *Paradoxes*, pp. 139-142.

- 27 Garland is paraphrasing remarks made by Lanier in *The English Novel and the Principle of Its Development* (New York: Scribner's, 1883), p. 45.
- 28 Slightly misquoted from "Thoughts," *Leaves of Grass* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1881-1882), p. 373. Garland's copy of this edition of *Leaves* is in the University of Southern California library.
- 29 "Years of the Modern," *Leaves of Grass* (1881-1882), p. 370.
- 30 "To You," *Leaves of Grass* (1881-1882), p. 187.
- 31 "By Blue Ontario's Shore," *Leaves of Grass* (1881-1882), p. 273. Garland has reversed the order of the third and fourth line quoted.
- 32 Garland seems to have combined two separate passages, only one of which has been located. The first part of the paragraph is from Philarète Chasles, *Anglo-American Literature and Manners*, trans. from the French (New York: Charles Scribner, 1852), p. 109.
- 33 Preface to *Leaves of Grass* (1855); see Harold W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley, eds., *Leaves of Grass, Comprehensive Reader's Edition* (New York: New York University Press, 1965), p. 712.
- 34 Preface to "As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free" (1872); see Blodgett and Bradley, *Leaves*, p. 740.
- 35 "Song of the Exposition," *Leaves of Grass* (1881-1882), p. 162.
- 36 "A Song for Occupations," *Leaves of Grass* (1881-1882), p. 175.
- 37 Garland is using this word in what is now an obsolete sense to mean "announce."
- 38 "Sparkles from the Wheel," *Leaves of Grass* (1881-1882), p. 301.
- 39 "Miracles," *Leaves of Grass* (1881-1882), p. 301.
- 40 Garland probably illustrated this point (when lecturing on the poet) by reading from Whitman's prose. At the top of his typescript page Garland has written: "Read 'Specimen Days.'"
- 41 Garland quotes partly from "Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun," *Leaves of Grass* (1881-1882), p. 245 and from an unlocated source.
- 42 Garland placed a question mark in the left margin of his typescript, perhaps to indicate an awareness that he had garbled the quotation from "Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood," *Leaves of Grass* (1881-1882), pp. 348-351.