

DISCOVERIES: A SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

INTRODUCTION

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SINCE ITS INCEPTION in the summer of 1983, the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* has printed forty original Whitman manuscripts on its back covers and many more inside. One of the most important functions of this journal is the identification and publication of previously unknown Whitman letters, poetry manuscripts, prose drafts, and notebook jottings. We are proud to be able to provide a showcase for these important materials that constitute what Clifton Joseph Furness labeled “Walt Whitman’s Workshop,” those manuscripts that reveal the first formulations of what would become familiar published work.

Over the years, too, we have produced several special double issues of *WWQR*. One of the most important was the issue in 1991 devoted to Whitman’s correspondence. Edwin Haviland Miller, the distinguished editor of the *Correspondence* volumes in *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman*, offered in that double-issue a second supplement of letters (the first supplement had been published in 1977 as a part of *The Collected Writings*) and a completely revised calendar of letters to Whitman. *WWQR* also published that double-issue in a book-format so that libraries and scholars could add it to their collections alongside the six volumes of correspondence in *The Collected Writings*. In the nine years since Miller’s second supplement, many additional Whitman letters have come to light, and, in this issue, Ted Genoways gathers all the letters that have been discovered since our 1991 double-issue. It is an impressive collection and includes some important finds. Those interested in Whitman will want to keep this special issue next to their *Correspondence* volumes as the official third supplement.

In the final year of his life, Whitman thought a lot about letters. Along with his friend and daily visitor, Horace Traubel, letters were his conduit to the world, and he frequently ruminated with Traubel about the mysterious nature of correspondence, at one point even developing what he called a “philosophy of correspondence”:

A letter is very subtle! Oh! The destiny of a letter should be well-marked from the first. We should know, make, every letter to fit its purpose—to go to the doctor, to the intimate friend, to the admirer, and so on and on, each having a quality its own, and for a

specific end. It may seem queer for me to have a philosophy of correspondence, but I have. And of course, *freedom* is the charm of a letter—before all other qualities. And a letter without freedom certainly has nothing left to it. (*WWC*, 9:3)

In the letters collected in this issue, that “freedom” is apparent as Whitman writes with directness and ease, expansive when he needs to be, concise when, as is often the case, he needs to say just one thing—“every letter to fit its purpose.” There’s little padding in Whitman’s epistolary prose: his words are honed, as if he felt a burden of precision for each particular recipient.

We also present in this issue a number of previously unpublished Whitman manuscripts, including important notes on Emerson and on “the religious idea.” We gather here, too, previously uncollected reviews of the 1855 and 1856 editions of *Leaves of Grass*, two forgotten early Whitman parodies, previously unrecorded early notices of Whitman, and a newly found piece of Whitman’s Civil War journalism. There’s also a remarkable discovery by Gary Schmidgall, documenting for the first time that there were in fact two separate and distinct printings of the first edition of *Leaves*, with one significantly altered line in the poem later entitled “Song of Myself.” This discovery has some major implications for Whitman textual scholarship, since the long-held assumption has been that type was not re-set during the printing of the first edition. That assumption must now be discarded, and, since this altered line has escaped the notice of earlier editors (including the editors of the *Textual Variorum of Leaves*), Schmidgall’s discovery also means that, more than ever, a census and collation of the existing copies of the first edition are necessary, since it is possible that other such changes remain as yet undiscovered.

A number of the letters and manuscripts printed in this issue come from the remarkable private collection of Kendall Reed, who, like Charles Feinberg before him, has been most generous in sharing his discoveries, allowing publication of previously unpublished materials, and offering the insights he has gained while building his superb collection.

It is impossible to know what new insights into Whitman will be initiated by the materials gathered in this issue. But it is refreshing to realize once again that Whitman produced so much writing and managed to scatter it so widely that new discoveries like these are sure to keep occurring. When they do, *WWQR* will promptly bring them to the attention of the Whitman community. Just when we think we know all there is to know about Whitman, new materials always seem to crop up. Whitman truly is “garrulous to the very last,” continuing to speak long after generations of his readers have fallen silent.

The University of Iowa