

REVIEW

HORACE TRAUBEL, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*. Volume 7. Edited by Jeanne Chapman and Robert MacIsaac. Foreword by Justin Kaplan. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992. xvi + 513 pp.

This seventh volume of a projected nine (the last two already edited or being edited) covers the period of July 7, 1890 to February 10, 1891. Traubel observes his thirty-second birthday on December 19. The most interesting events in the chronicle are the poet's receipt of Symonds' letter asking about the meaning of "Calamus" ("Then W. started to read the letter again, and suddenly his face paled in the strangest way"), Harned's dinner party (which ought to take its place alongside the dinner parties in Howell's *The Rise of Silas Lapham* and Chopin's *The Awakening*: "At one point in the dinner, [Whitman] sat with a piece of chicken suspended on his fork and entered into quite a talk about the 'meanings' of 'Leaves of Grass'"), the publication of a fraudulent letter in which Matthew Arnold greets the Good Gray Poet, Colonel Robert Ingersoll's lecture on "Liberty in Literature" (its full text included in the appendix), the death of Walt's favorite brother Jeff at age 57, and separate visits by Thomas Eakins and Herbert Gilchrist (who sketched Whitman at Timber Creek and later painted his portrait).

It is noteworthy that in this volume as in the others Walt and Horace are emotionally riveted to each other, yet as Ed Folsom remarked to me not long ago there are no known photographs of the two together. Evidently, this relationship was different from the sibling-lover affairs the poet had with Peter Doyle, Harry Stafford, and others. It was based on literature more than personality, buoyed by a sense of professionalism—the profession being the institutionalization of *Leaves of Grass* and its neglected author. Whitman seems to know that Traubel will speak for him after he is gone, and Traubel already assumes that mantle, even to the point of signing copies of *Leaves of Grass* for himself and the poet. When Traubel meets Edmund Clarence Stedman, who first legitimized Whitman in the literary establishment of the day, he is defensive when the Victorian critic assumes he knows more about Whitman than he does. (Traubel would continue this possessiveness throughout his life—as he did in *The Conservator*, where he reviewed the biographies of Binns, Perry, and others rather superciliously.) As a future literary executor, he faithfully keeps watch over lecture revenues, sees that the old man signs all the books Bucke has sent down from Canada, persistently asks about the famous Emerson letter (which remains illusive throughout this volume), and maintains meticulous notes on the poet's failing health (increasing deafness, bowel problems, loss of weight).

Indeed, these volumes, or at least the latest ones, are about the death of a poet. When Traubel finds Whitman having a rare good day, it is as if Whitman has risen from the dead ("Happy this night's 20 minutes with W.!" he exclaims on December 16). Whitman also experiences one or two bouts of mental

confusion, mixing up at one point the Ingersoll lecture, the last birthday bash, and the lecture on Lincoln. Many of us have spent time at this bedside lately, during the centennial celebrations, seeing all his photographs again, hearing his (actual?) voice, and this volume gives us seven months of that proximity. There really is nothing with which to compare the Traubel volumes, and certainly we have no such similar offhand, specific record for any other writer of the nineteenth century. It is a pity, though, that the volumes were never annotated. Harned, for example, in this volume runs for public office, but the reader never learns much else except that he apparently succeeded in his political bid. It might be profitable for the Southern Illinois University Press to commission and publish a final volume of notes, which could also include a comprehensive index, especially since the ones in the early volumes are not that accurate or exhaustive.

Whitman's views here are consistent with those in the earlier volumes. He continues to despise Edward Emerson, his brother-in-law Charles L. Heyde, "Sunday-School men." He works behind the scenes to advance his book and reputation, at one point inflating the number of auditors at the Ingersoll lecture from 1,000 to 1,800 for an article Traubel was submitting to *The Truth Seeker*. But then the record has been changed rather dramatically over the last one hundred years since the poet's death. O that Whitman might have been present at this year's centennial gatherings: he would have met his doubles in Whitman impersonators and heard himself described as a "cocksucker" and incestuous big brother to the retarded Eddy ("I effuse my flesh in eddies"). Perhaps Whitman realized that this kind of speculation would come with the territory of being a "modern" poet. He told Traubel on July 14 (overlooking the anniversary of the French Revolution): "It is a new wonder to me, day by day, how much is put into 'Leaves of Grass' that I never intended to be there. I am discovered in all sorts of impossible guises. We must submit, there is no defense against that!"

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