

WALT WHITMAN, EDITOR AT THE *NEW-YORK ATLAS*



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WHEN ZACHARY TURPIN DISCOVERED the journalistic series “Manly Health and Training” in 2016,¹ one of the questions that remained was why Whitman would have chosen the *New-York Atlas* as his venue for the publication. After all, scholarly commentary generally suggests that Whitman’s previous engagement with the paper’s editor and proprietor, Anson Herrick, ended on particularly bitter terms. Following a short stint as editor of the *Aurora* (the *Atlas*’s daily sister publication) in 1842, Whitman made a quick departure from Herrick’s paper, a move David Reynolds describes as “surrounded by infighting and backbiting.”² Turpin thus wonders: “Why the *Atlas*, rather than some other paper—did it pay the most? Was it the only paper willing to buy Whitman’s columns?” (3). Even the topics covered in Whitman’s self-help-focused articles—primarily diet, health, and exercise—were a noticeable departure from the *Atlas*’s regular front-page offerings of serial fiction, urban sketches, gossip, and politics. Here we present new evidence on Whitman’s relationship with the paper that might explain this mystery: we believe that the Sunday paper chose to publish “Manly Health” because Whitman was one of its editors.

The owner of the *Atlas* provides the first clue. In late spring of 1861, Herrick published a multi-part series on the history of New York’s Sunday press in the *Atlas*, then overseen by himself, his brother Hugh, and the English-born poet Henry Morford. (Later, Herrick’s sons would join the operation.) In the installment of May 12, Herrick turns his full focus to the staff of the *Atlas*, providing an extensive, albeit not exhaustive, list of the paper’s collaborators. It includes this passage, excerpted here in full (see Figure 1). In the center of the paragraph, we encounter a familiar name: “Walt Whitman, whose dirty and bestial ‘Leaves of Grass’ have since disgusted every decent man who has been snared into reading them, and well entitled him to a term on Blackwell’s Island under the statute against indecent personal exposures.”³ The list then goes on,

naming two dozen newspapermen and -women, who had been associated with the *Atlas* in the more than two decades since its founding in 1838.

Wendy Katz, in her invaluable “Unofficial Index” to antebellum newspapers, acknowledges this piece, noting that it contains a list of “other writers for [the] *Atlas*.”⁴ However, tracing the wording of this list carefully—and cross-referencing it with known editors and associate editors—makes clear that Whitman is not just named as a “writer” for the *Atlas*, but indeed as one who “wielded the pen at the desks of the *Atlas*.” This list is, then, not a list of *contributors*, who periodically submitted writing, but of *editors*. Herrick himself primes the metaphor: “pen[s] at the desks” equal “pens . . . editorially employed.”⁵

During the same extended space of time, it may be supposed that many different pens have been editorially employed on the old ATLAS, at different periods of its existence, in addition to the large body of well-known outside contributors who have furnished matter for its columns. Without attempting to make a full list of those who have at different times wielded the pen at the desks of the ATLAS, we may mention among those involved in its earlier history, the names of Frederick West, Samuel J. Burr, Washington G. Snethen (all connected with its commencement); Samuel Nichols; Henry A. Buckingham; S. S. Southworth, now of the *Mercury*, whose “John Smith, Jr., of Arkansas” papers, commenced in the *Boston Morning Post* and other newspapers, as correspondence, were continued in the ATLAS; George G. Foster, already mentioned; Walt. Whitman, whose dirty and bestial “Leaves of Grass” have since disgusted every decent man who has been soared into reading them, and well entitled him to a term on Blackwell’s Island under the statute against indecent personal exposures; Louis Fitzgerald Tasistro, a well-known and somewhat popular general writer and literary Bohemian; Lawrence Labree, a most laborious writer, long a steady wheel-horse on the ATLAS, who died about two years since at his residence at Hoboken; Zavarr Wilmshurst, an Englishman of decided talent, who married the brilliant little Getty Gay, (herself an old contributor), and had the bitter grief of burying her not many months since; David Wemyss Jobson, the “expert,” who threw so many thorns in the path of poor Lola Montez, and not long ago temporarily filled an

English prison for libelling one of the aristocracy; William Burns, an admirable writer, and, as otherwise stated, one of the founders of the *Dispatch*; James F. Otis, now for years connected with the New Orleans *Picayune*, and the “Gemotice” of that popular journal, at present buried under the wet-blanket of secession; Thomas L. Nichols, the incarnate Bohemian who lately divides himself between Mary Gove, catholicism and the water-cure; Thomas J. Newhall, of the New England press; Thaddeus W. Meighan, one of the best-known hard-workers of the New York press, a strong man in point of talent, but a comet in eccentricity, who has just given up an engagement on the *Dispatch* to mount the gray jacket of a captain in Billy Wilson’s Zouaves, and “march through Baltimore”; and Elger S. D. Bangs, one of the most variedly learned and eccentric men ever connected with the press of this city, and who died from over-work and over-excitement some four years ago. A. G. Seaman, mentioned as temporarily one of the proprietors, was one of the editors during his connection; and John A. Harrington, the somewhat well-known “Mr. John Carboy” of the press of Philadelphia and this city, held an engagement here until within a few months past. The present working editorial force employed upon the ATLAS consists of Anson Herrick, the founder; Hugh M. Herrick, Clerk in the Court of Common Pleas, and brother to the proprietor; and Henry Morford—“the Governor,”—at present conspicuously connected as a high-private with the Nineteenth Ward Home Guard—who has discharged the duties of Associate Editor since August, 1860, to the entire satisfaction of all parties concerned—his *own* satisfaction, especially.

Figure 1: Excerpt from “The History of the Grandfather Atlas” by Anson Herrick (*New York Atlas*, May 12, 1861).

Although this “list of those who have wielded at different times the pen at the desks of the *Atlas*” follows a vague chronology—beginning with the paper’s “commencement” in 1838 and ending with the 1861 editors—individual “editorial pens” appear slightly out of order. Some names might even be partially misremembered: the “Thomas J. Newhall” at the close of Herrick’s list is most likely *James R. Newhall*, who was also Whitman’s co-editor at the *Aurora*.⁶ Overall, however, the paragraph paints a compelling picture of an editorial department in frequent flux. To make sense of this complex staffing history, we have contextualized the 1861 list with contemporary newspaper data from the 1840s and 1850s and translated it into a graphic showing the tenure or possible tenure (gradients) of each editorial voice:

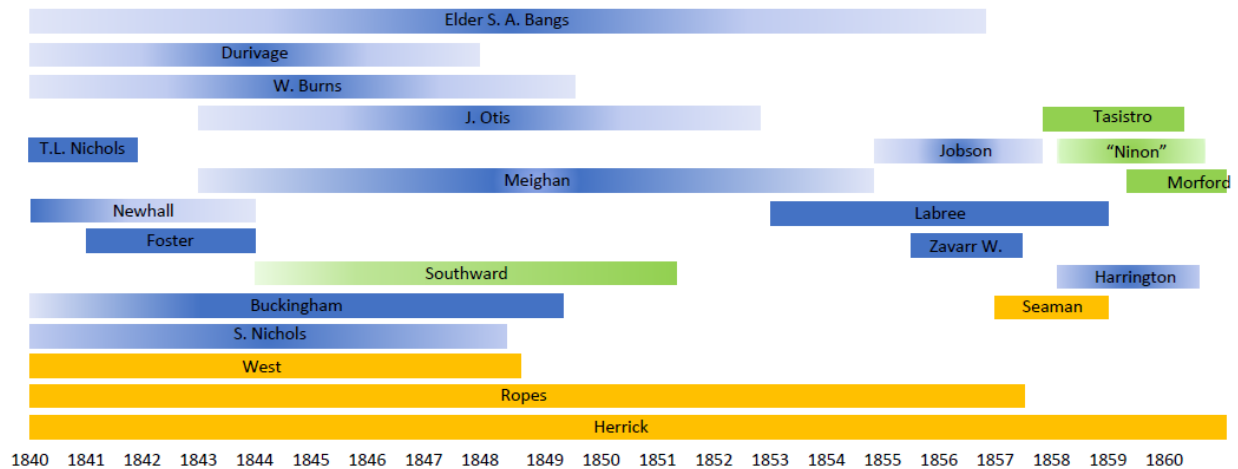


Figure 2: Those “editorially employed” at the *Atlas* [blue = named in 1861 editorial, green = (also) named in paper as editor/associate editor, yellow = (also) co-owner of paper; color grading expresses chronological uncertainty]. Note: the paper expanded from 4 to 8 pages between 1857 and 1858.

While the gradient ranges indicate a wide degree of uncertainty for some “pen[s] at the desks,” it becomes clear that editorships at the *Atlas* were typically short: to be remembered as a “long and steady wheel-horse”⁷ somebody like Lawrence Labree only had to have been involved for around five years. Most others likely spent somewhere between a season and a year at the *Atlas*. With an editorial staff of around three or four at any given time (the number of editorial staff present at the paper’s commencement and in 1861) and a publishing run of over twenty years, a list like Herrick’s appears to be a fairly accurate record of most of those who worked in an editorial capacity at the *Atlas*.

Logically, there are three possible scenarios for Whitman's editorial employment at the *Atlas*: (a) Herrick conflated Whitman at the *Aurora* with the *Atlas* (the papers shared an office); (b) an early tenure in the 1840s⁸; or (c) a late tenure in the 1850s, likely parallel to the publication of "Manly Health." We find the third scenario to be most probable and will detail our rationale below, arguing that there is sufficient evidence to claim a more involved relationship between Whitman and the *Atlas* that helps explain why "Manly Health and Training" appeared in its pages.

As Whitman's only known contribution to appear in the *Atlas*,⁹ the 1858 health guide serves as a potential anchor for an uncredited editorial tenure. At this point in Whitman's career, he had, of course, already shifted his public persona from dandy-newspaperman to poet-tough, rendering a named editorship much less appealing to the image-conscious Whitman. While Whitman tried to make his mark in the newspaperdom of the 1840s by getting his name associated with leading papers, the Whitman of *Leaves* relied on such work now largely as a means of subsistence and, occasionally, self-promotion. His concurrent involvement with the *Brooklyn Daily Times* discloses a similar disinterest in being outed as a hard-working newspaperman. While recalled as an occasional editor of the *Times* by colleagues years after his tenure, an association even acknowledged by Whitman himself in an 1885 letter to Charles Skinner, the poet's name does not appear in an editorial capacity throughout the late 1850s.¹⁰

Still, this does not mean Whitman saw this unattributed work as pure hackery, especially in the *Atlas*. In fact, he seems to have treated publication in the local press as a convenient medium for experimenting with new ideas and formats, some of which were pursued with a degree of gumption that goes beyond mere column-filling subsistence work. "Manly Health and Training," for example, does not appear to have been intended as a one-off series produced for a quick buck, as its pseudonymous attribution and slap-dash style might imply.

Indeed, there is a crucial editorial frame to "Manly Health" that is (and has been) overlooked when the series is considered as a piece submitted by Whitman the free-lance writer rather than Whitman as an editor of the *Atlas*. The issue containing the last installment of "Manly Health" includes an extended puff that employs the editorial "we" to promote "Mose Velsor" and ensure the series survives the vicissitudes of a weekly paper.¹¹ This editorial puff outs "Mose Velsor" as a pseudonym and offers insider information about the composition of the series, connecting the origins of Velsor's

diet and exercise advice to the training regimens of highly experienced athletes. Effectively a postscript to “Manly Health,” this puff piece promotes Velsor’s vision as crucial, even existential, to the American Man and the American Republic:

This may seem strong language but it is the result of a deliberate thought and judgement. “Mose Velsor,” in the course of his articles, well indicates that the conditions called health and disease are not trivial effects, produced by temporary causes, but the results of long trains of processes and influences. When a man is really ill, for instance, although he is apt to lay it to some little cause, of recent date, the undoubted truth is that what really makes him ill, the foundation on which the whole evil stands, has long been preparing, layer by layer, for weeks and months, perhaps for years. The manly frame, thoroughly prepared and bred from boyhood to manhood, and then kept in decent condition, would be innocuous to disease; but then it would indeed require all those antecedents—of which how many cases could we find, through New York city, or any city, or country either? Yet all this is vital, and that theory of doctoring and medicating is nonsense which does not involve it and make “health, strength and beauty,” familiar themes of daily habit and household knowledge, instead of keeping them for the apothecarie’s shop and the doctor’s confessional.

It closes by disclosing its intent:

We believe it is the intention of “Mose Velsor” to put these articles in shape for publication, in handy and cheap book-form. Just now there is among all classes of American young men, great interest in this subject of MANLY TRAINING, and we think a publisher would make a good and profitable investment by bringing it out.

This somewhat lengthy piece, titled

We invite the special attention of our readers to our new Revolutionary story. “Marian Monckton” is certainly one of Charles Burdett’s very best efforts, and will repay a careful perusal. It has the rare merit of being not only historically true in its characters, but worked up in such romantic style, as to enchain the attention of the reader. Again we say, read it, and carefully.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT!

**A FIRST-CLASS ORIGINAL WORK ON
MANLY TRAINING.**

We commence this week a series of articles which cannot be better indicated than by the aim stated in their own heading,

**TO TEACH THE SCIENCE OF A SOUND AND BEAUTIFUL
BODY.**

This work is not only original and of a high degree of literary merit, but goes into full practical details, giving that specific advice in all departments of general training for health, whose result, if faithfully followed, would be, for every man who reads it,

A NOBLE AND ROBUST PHYSIQUE.

The articles, which we shall continue week after week contain many things of direct application to

Young Men,	Clerks,
Mechanics,	Actors, Vocalists, and all
Operatives in Factories,	Public Performers,
All Employees In-doors,	Lawyers, Preachers, &c.
Farmers,	Literary Persons,
Gentlemen,	Middle-aged and Elderly Men,
	&c., &c., &c.

To these—to all—the facts, laws, suggestions, &c., conveyed in the above work, will be of priceless value. For what can be more to a man than a *perfect condition of health and strength*?

These articles are for *the People*; all cannot only appreciate them, but easily follow them. Technical and medical terms are avoided. After once commencing them, they will be found of as engrossing interest as any romance.

They give the great subject of Training for Health its due position, not as something merely for an occasion here and there, to fit a man for a race, a prize-fight, &c.; but as **A SYSTEM FOR GENERAL AND CONTINUAL USE AMONG ALL YOUNG AND MIDDLE-AGED MEN.**

This point is argued with consummate eloquence and ability.

We have said enough, we are sure, to make the reader look with interest upon these valuable articles, which will be continued for some weeks.

Figure 3: Ad for “Manly Health.”

“Athletic Men Wanted” (attached to this article in full), is then not so much an editorial comment on “Manly Health” but the voice of the paper perpetuating “Velsor’s” argument—and pitching it to potential publishers. It is our belief that Whitman was the author of this editorial in the *Atlas*. We have assessed “Athletic Men Wanted” using a computational stylometric approach, which offers additional support for our claim of Whitmanian authorship.¹²

Thus, it appears that Whitman was not primarily writing “Manly Health” as a tossed-off piece for quick remuneration, as initial scholarship has suggested.¹³ Instead, the publication of “Manly Health” in the *Atlas* seems to have been the foregrounding of a more ambitious and free-standing project: a collection of articles gathered into a book subsequent to its appearance in the *Atlas*—a “handy and cheap” publication to carry in one’s pocket, notably similar to Whitman’s vision for *Leaves of Grass*, a self-help guide to be read on the omnibus, at the counter during a slow sales period, or in the workshop upon the close of the day. In light of the doldrums into which *Leaves* had fallen during this period, *Manly Health*—the imagined but ultimately unpublished book—begins to look like another unrealized career path for Whitman’s writing life in the late 1850s.

A carefully laid out advertisement for “Manly Health,” published twice at the start of the series’ run, on September 12 and on September 19, supports this argument. As Turpin has observed, the ad was drafted in Whitman’s notebooks and seemingly transferred into the pages of the *Atlas* (“Introduction,” 156). Perhaps Whitman even set the type for this advertisement himself. These ads are extraordinary for Herrick’s paper since, generally, even high-profile contributions did not receive such treatment. A standard promotion appears to have consisted of a 3–4-line manicule on the first page (see top of Figure 3). In contrast, the promotion of Whitman’s mini pamphlet is quite prominent (bottom of Figure 3). It is telling that contributions like the one by Charles Burdett, the popular journalist and novelist, did not receive as much effusive praise and promotion as Whitman’s new venture did in the pages of the *Atlas*. Clearly, the editorial promotion of “Manly Health and Training,” both through the paper’s advertising of the series and the editorial puffing for its future, indicates that behind the editor’s desk sat a motivating interest in the publication and success of the series beyond the bounds of the paper itself.

Besides the technicalities of production and promotion, there are thematic resonances between “Manly Health” and the *Atlas* at large that might suggest involvement by Whitman. Throughout 1858, the paper also frequently ran short “self-help” style tidbits, usually on the right side of its fifth or sixth page, offering brief tips on health, happiness, and self-reform under

*The physiognomy of the Brain
from a literary life.*

Take Notice

In addition to these ailments literary men are subjected, by the very nature of their pursuits, to an excitable condition of the nervous system, which often manifests itself in inordinate apprehension about small matters, and great irritability of temper. "These," says Thackerack, "mark, in common life and ordinary circumstances, the character of men who, on great occasions, manifest the noblest benevolence, courage, and coolness." This constant excitability not unfrequently leads to inflammation, and sometimes to a softening, of the brain. Dean Swift and Daniel Webster, both of whom possessed great intellects and thought profoundly, died of this affection. It is well known that the Herculean tasks assumed by Sir Walter Scott, in advanced age, led to an affection of the brain, which first dimmed and then extinguished forever the lofty intellect of this great writer, months before his body yielded to final dissolution.

Yet, notwithstanding these evils incident to a literary life, its average duration is of a respectable length, and frequently extends to great age. This was particularly the case among the ancient philosophers, who alternated their time between abstruse studies in the closet, and conversations and speeches in the midst of their fellow-citizens in the open air and public buildings in which they were wont to assemble. Besides, their philosophy generally taught them to be placid in temper, cautious in language, abstemious in diet, and unmoved by surrounding circumstances, all of which tend to the prolongation of life. Plato died at 81; Xenocrates at 82; Thales at 89; and Democritus at 100.

Modern philosophers, whose works are not always represented by their lives, although not short-lived, fall below the age attained by the ancients. Thus, Bacon died at 64; Boyle at 65; Newton at 84; and Harvey at 88. In our own country, Rittenhouse died at 64; and Franklin at 84; and of those engaged in other literary pursuits, Noah Webster, the lexicographer, died at 85; and Dr. Thacher at 90. M. Brunard selected at random one hundred and fifty savans, one half from the Academy of Sciences, the other from the Academy of Belles Lettres, and found that their average at death was a little above 70 years.

DEFINITION

1. AMATIVENESS, Sexual and
2. PHILOPROGENITIVENESS
3. ADHESIVENESS, Friendship
4. UNION FOR LIFE, Duality in marriage.
5. INHABITIVENESS, Love of home—patriotism.
6. CONTINUITY, Completion—one thing at a time.
7. COMBATIVENESS, Resistance—defence.
8. DESTRUCTIVENESS, Executiveness—force.
9. ALIMENTIVENESS, Appetite—hunger.
10. ACQUISITIVENESS, Frugality—accumulation.
11. SECRETIVENESS, Policy—management.
12. CAUTIOUSNESS, Prudence—provision.
13. APPROBATIVENESS, Honor—ambition.
14. SELF ESTEEM, Self respect and confidence.
15. FIRMNESS, Decision—perseverance.
16. CONSCIENTIOUSNESS, Justice—moral principle.
17. HOPE, Expectation—enterprise.
18. MARVELLOUSNESS, Spirituality—prescience.
19. VENERATION, Devotion—worship of God.
20. BENEVOLENCE, Kindness—goodness.
21. CONSTRUCTIVENESS, Mechanical tenacity.

NUMBERS.

22. MIRTHFULNESS, Jocoseness—wit—fun.
23. INDIVIDUALITY, Observation—acutiveness.
24. FORM, Recollection of shape.
25. SIZE, Measures by the eye.
26. WEIGHT, Balancing—muscular control.
27. COLOR, Judgment of colors.
28. ORDER, Method—system—arrangement.
29. CALCULATION, Mental arithmetic.
30. LOCALITY, Recollection of places.
31. EVENTUALITY, Memory of facts.
32. TIME, Cognizance of duration.
33. TUNE, Music—melody by ear.
34. LANGUAGE, Expression of ideas.
35. CAUSALITY, Causes applied to effects.
36. COMPARISON, Inductive reasoning.
37. HUMAN NATURE, Discernment of character
38. AGREEABLENESS, Pleasantness—suavity.

Figure 4: Whitman's clippings/notes on brain health and aging (Trent Collection, Duke University Libraries).

such titles as “Cultivate Cheerfulness” or “Work” (on the value of “honest labor”).¹⁴ In this regard, the *Atlas* echoed the more expansively edifying, domestic, and health-related topics of other weekly papers during this period.¹⁵ Some of these items might be read as anticipating “Manly Health”—such as the piece of July 27, 1858, titled “Mental Over-Exertion” that argues that “over-excitement of the brain,” especially in “literary men” and among youths, is an “injurious” use of vital energy that has a negative effect on one’s longevity.¹⁶ This claim compellingly presages Whitman’s “Too Much Brain Action and Fretting” section of “Manly Health.”¹⁷ While this argument is by no means exclusive to Whitman, it did occupy his mind: it appears on his famous notebook page on the “Physique of the Brain from a Literary Life” via a clipping from the January 17, 1857, issue of *Harper’s Weekly*, titled, “Effect of Literary Occupation Upon the Duration of Life” (see Figure 4).¹⁸ “Mental Over-Exertion” corresponds to Whitman’s underlining in this *Harper’s Weekly* article. “Take Notice,” Whitman suggests to himself in the margin. In this way, writings in the *Atlas* prior to the publication of “Manly Health” seem to build on Whitman’s marginalia, suggesting Whitman may have expressed his interest in these topics in the pages of the *Atlas* months before his major self-help work appeared in print.

Indeed, for a paper owned and run by a man who by 1861 described *Leaves of Grass* as an act of indecent exposure, the *Atlas* seemed quite partial to Whitman and his work in the late 1850s. A brief item of 1855, for instance, takes issue with the poet’s anonymous self-review in the *American Phrenological Journal*—which it seems to identify as such—and lets its readers know that those writing for the *Atlas* do not feel “compelled to puff ourselves, or get our friends to do it for us.” Still, there is little of the animosity by Herrick (who likely authored the piece) towards Whitman that biographers like Reynolds have read into the relationship: “We hope that Walter Whitman,” the note concludes, “whom we really and truly regard as a friend, will not quarrel with us for our remarks.”¹⁹

But perhaps Whitman found a way around Herrick’s discouragement of self-puffing, since the poet began receiving support from the *Atlas* shortly afterwards. In addition to brief notices—like an excerpt from Thomas Butler Gunn’s *Physiology of New York Boarding-Houses* (1857) that describes a “naughty” lady who secretly reads *Leaves*,²⁰ or a note about “Walt Whitman, one of the most popular writers of the day” driving an omnibus²¹—one series stands out in particular: “Fourteen Thousand Miles Afoot,” authored by Dr. William Porter Ray,²² sub rosa as “A Peripatetic.” Ray did not serve as an editor of the *Atlas*, but he was a frequent contributor between 1859 and 1861 (also writing as “Tewksbury”). An M.D. and recently-fired Episcopalian presbyter,²³ Ray

not only name-dropped the poet repeatedly²⁴ but also composed a defense of *Leaves* that remains one of the most extensive, over-the-top pieces of praise for Whitman prior to 1861 not authored by the poet himself.

The installment in question is later reprinted in Whitman's promotional pamphlet *Imprints*,²⁵ but has so far not been identified as from the *Atlas* (*Imprints* credits it just by the series title). Beginning with an admonishment of the Female Moral Reform Society ("To such even an angel would appear indecent without breeches"), the short essay quickly turns to Whitman. It is worth excerpting here at length for three reasons: it discloses information about the poet that was not public knowledge; it describes *Leaves of Grass* as a public-health intervention; and it suggests Whitman was pursuing the *Atlas* as a promotional tool²⁶ in the late 1850s:

Nothing can more clearly demonstrate the innate vulgarity of our American people, their radical immodesty, their internal licentiousness, their unchastity of heart, their foulness of feeling than the tabooing of Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass." It is quite impossible to find a publisher for the new edition which has long since been ready for the press, so measureless is the depravity of public taste. There is not an indecent word, an immodest expression, in the entire volume; not a suggestion which is not purity itself; and yet it is rejected on account of its indecency! So much do I think of this work, by the healthiest and most original poet America has produced, so valuable a means is it of rightly estimating character, that I have been accustomed to try with it of what quality was the virtue my friends possessed. How few stood the test I shall not say. Some did, and praised it beyond measure. These I set down without hesitation as radically pure, as "born again," and fitted for the society of heaven and the angels. And this test I would recommend to every one. Would you, reader male or female, ascertain if you be actually modest, innocent, pure-minded, read the "Leaves of Grass." If you find nothing improper there you are one of the virtuous and pure. If, on the contrary, you find your sense of decency shocked, then is that sense of decency an exceedingly foul one, and you, man or woman, a very vulgar, dirty person.

The atmosphere of the "Leaves of Grass" is as sweet as that of a hay-field. Its pages exhale the fragrance of nature. It takes you back to man's pristine state of innocence in Paradise and lifts you Godwards. It is the healthiest book, morally, this century has produced; and if it were reprinted in the form of a cheap tract, and scattered broadcast over the land, put into the hands of youth, and into the hands of men and women everywhere, it would do more towards elevating our nature, towards eradicating this foul, vulgar, licentious sham modesty, which so degrades our people now, than any other means within my knowledge.²⁷

Printed half a year after "Manly Health," this celebration of *Leaves* underscores the similarities between "Mose" and Walt as well as their respective book projects, envisioned as "cheap tract[s], . . . scattered broadcast over the land, put into the hands of youth, and into the hands of men and women everywhere" as

a means to ensure physical and moral “health” of the young nation.

Likewise, Ray’s piece echoes a pressing concern of Whitman’s: an inability to find a publisher for the “new edition” he is believed to have completed prior to his 1860 trip to Boston. This frustration was certainly not public knowledge beyond Whitman’s circle of personal acquaintances;²⁸ we could locate no contemporary newspaper that repeated this claim. Read alongside the *Atlas*’s pitch to find a book publisher for “Manly Health,” it suggests that Whitman doubled down on soliciting other voices to advocate on his behalf—sidestepping any negative associations attached to his name and his reputation for self-puffery.²⁹ Whitman’s editorial involvement with the *Atlas* would explain how one of the paper’s frequent contributors had access to insider knowledge about the poet’s plans and frustrations.

The *Atlas* retained some degree of inside knowledge of Whitman until 1860 when the paper’s tone towards him drastically changed. It was then, when the editor John Adams Harrington (writing as “Mr. John Carboy”), for instance, began to repeatedly attack Whitman as an “author of Bosh”³⁰ whose work was only fit to be read at the opening of the Japanese embassy, his “poems being thoroughly incomprehensible to our people, may possibly be appreciated by the Japan Princes.”³¹ Harrington later penned one of the earliest Whitman parodies.³² Clearly, by 1860 Whitman had fallen out of favor. Herrick’s tone, as seen in the 1861 editorial that opened this essay, followed step.³³

Still, tantalizing bits of information in the *Atlas* suggest some personal knowledge of Whitman’s activities even after this change of fortune. Indeed, the *Atlas* printed the first public acknowledgement so far located of Whitman’s trip to Boston to work with Thayer and Eldridge. Again, this acknowledgement was part of a mocking attack by Harrington, who noted on April 8, 1860 (only three weeks after Whitman’s departure): “Walt Whitman has gone to Boston and will deliver a lecture upon his own genius, which he has appropriately titled, ‘A Stupidetta.’”³⁴ Whatever contact the paper still had with Whitman or his acquaintances, it was enough to have an inside scoop on the poet’s movements—but not enough to know about the third edition of *Leaves* (which certainly would have been welcome fodder for Harrington).³⁵ Perhaps the parting wounds were fresh, or perhaps Whitman had carefully withheld concrete plans for a third edition from former colleagues at the *Atlas* now that the climate there had turned against his work. Nevertheless, Whitman was still a topic of discussion around the office of the *Atlas* by this period, and discussants seem to have had some personal contact with Whitman or those close to the poet, enough so to know his whereabouts, but not enough to know the reasons for his departure.

Likewise, the claim that he was on a lecture tour acknowledges that Whitman was known for fishing around for publicity through means other than poetry alone, and that a series of lectures was not out of character.

It seems, then, that Whitman may have been “editorially employed” around the time “Manly Health” was published (late 1858) and severed his ties with the *Atlas* by or before the early spring of 1860 when its tone changes from “Friend Whitman” to “Dirty Whitman.” However, the question remains: when could Whitman’s tenure have started? In the absence of a large number of long, overtly Whitmanian writings in the *Atlas* prior to 1858, we have identified the following piece as potentially the earliest extant clipping that suggests Whitman’s authorship. In the short news item, the only one on the subject we could locate in digitized papers that year, there are two themes that recall Whitman’s *Jack Engle* (1852): a critique of the contract system of street cleaning and the villainous Richard D. Covert. As previously argued,³⁶ the then-former lawyer Richard D. Covert was very likely the blueprint for the character of “Covert” in *Jack Engle* and “Revenge and Requital” (later “One Wicked Impulse!”), a real-life villain who defrauded the Whitman family during Walt’s youth.³⁷ In the short clipping from the *Atlas*, Covert is *finally* getting his comeuppance:

Two Members of the Hoboken Council Board and Van Mater, and Street Commissioner Whitney were arrested last week and taken to Bergen jail, in Hudson City, on complaint of Richard D. Covert, coal-dealer in Hoboken, charging them with “malicious prosecution.” The malicious prosecution amounted to nothing more than removing from the sidewalk coal-dust and wood, by order of the Council, on the complaint of several citizens. We are afraid that Mr. Covert has this time “put his foot in it,” and will have to suffer for false imprisonment. . . .³⁸

This news item adds one more piece of historical evidence to the fictionalization of this character in *Jack Engle*: as in the novella, Covert relies on the police to enforce his nefarious plans. Certainly, Covert was far from being a celebrity or even a well-known citizen—and the emphatic “this time” only makes sense for a writer who had a good deal of knowledge of Covert and his usual misdeeds. For the readers of the *Atlas*, it would likely have been a puzzling one-off comment.

While a lack of access to many sections of the *Atlas*’s run and a dearth of expressly Whitman pieces puts a more assertive attribution beyond the scope of this essay, we believe there is sufficient circumstantial evidence to suggest a likely chronological frame for Whitman’s tenure as an editor of the *Atlas*, a tenure that began around 1857 and concluded in late 1859 or very early 1860—thereby putting it roughly parallel to a potential editorial tenure at the *Brooklyn Daily*

Times.³⁹ The prospect is logistically feasible, since the *Times*'s daily publication schedule did not interfere with the *Atlas*'s weekly format. As such it provides more biographical context about how Whitman, then in dire need of income, managed to keep afloat.

We believe that the theory of a co-editorship of the *Atlas* in the late 1850s, anchored by statements of the paper's owner and supported by circumstantial textual evidence, suggests the pages of *Atlas* as a crucial place for further explorations of what may just be Whitman's most generative period as a writer. Having uttered his "yawp" to a largely indifferent public, he in these years was open to experimenting again. Between 1857 and 1860, Whitman returned to the idea that message trumps medium—musing, perhaps in the same vein as he did in the famous notebook that sees the birth of *Leaves of Grass*: "Novel?—Work of some sort? Play? . . . Plot for a Poem or other work A spiritual novel?"⁴⁰ One might now want to add: Health tract?

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NOTES

1 Zachary Turpin, "Introduction to Walt Whitman's 'Manly Health and Training'" *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 33 (Winter/Spring 2016), esp. 161-164.

2 David Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1996), 102.

3 [Anson Herrick], "The History of the Grandfather Atlas, and of the other Sunday and Weekly Papers of New York City," *Atlas* (May 12, 1861), 1. As Herrick was the only person who witnessed the *Atlas*'s progress since 1838, he seems like the only feasible candidate for authorship of this piece.

4 Wendy Katz, "*Atlas* (*Sunday Morning Atlas*; *New York Atlas*)," *Katz's Unofficial Index to Antebellum New York City Newspapers*, katznewspapers.com/atlas.

5 The *Brooklyn Daily Times*, by then another recent employer of Whitman, also quotes the line about "dirty" Whitman and likewise considers it proof that Whitman was "one of [the *Atlas*'s] . . . editors" (May 18, 1861, 2).

6 Thomas J. Newhall was James R. Newhall's ancestor—the latter Newhall would author historical scholarship about the former and may have used that name as a pen name. See *Newhall's Lin: or Jewels of the Third Plantation* (D.C. Colesworthy, 1880), 117. No "Thomas J. Newhall" could be identified as writing for New York newspapers in the 1840s or 1850s. If he was a correctly named,

distinct person, he was likely a rather obscure figure, perhaps related to the Newhall of the *Aurora*. For more on the editorial history of the *Atlas* (especially in its first decades), see Katz's *Humbug! The Politics of Art Criticism in New York City's Penny Press* ([New York: Fordham University Press, 2020], esp. 164, 196) as well as her 2018 talk "'All so juicy ripe . . . But none of them for me': Whitman's Satirists and their Pleasures" (Transatlantic Walt Whitman Association Symposium, Dortmund, Germany, 2018), available in transcript on her website.

7 [Herrick], "The History."

8 Katz has previously argued for Whitmanian involvement with the *Atlas* in these years, namely via a series of letters titled "Brooklyn Affairs" that appear in the *Atlas* between 1847 to 1850 (see her "A Newly Discovered Whitman Poem about William Cullen Bryant," *WWQR* 32 [Summer/Fall 2014], 70, 74; and "Previously Undocumented Art Criticism by Walt Whitman" *WWQR* 32 [Spring 2015], 226). While this series of letters (each signed "Aristides") is extensive, it is not authored by Whitman. Indeed, its pseudonymous author acknowledges being a lawyer in one letter—and the series actually continues (from Brooklyn, with detailed local news) while Whitman spends the spring of 1848 in New Orleans. This incorrect attribution appears to be based on a misreading of an oddly-worded passage in Rubin, who noted that "Aristides" wrote about Whitman—not that he is Whitman (see: Joseph Jay Rubin, *The Historic Whitman* [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1973], 406). The pieces providing updates on Whitman are the "Brooklyn Affairs" pieces of December 7, 1847 (2), January 23, 1848 (2), and May 6, 1849 (3). Additionally, John Thorn has recently identified that Whitman copied elements from an 1845 piece from the *Atlas* for the *Aurora*. In his assessment, Thorn "[comes] down on the side of plagiarism" and finds a Whitman involvement with the *Atlas* in these years unlikely ("Walt Whitman, Plagiarist?," *Our Game*, ourgame.mlblogs.com/walt-whitman-plagiarist-ecf4d0bf9201).

9 The authors did not have access to many issues of the *Atlas*, most notably any issues between mid-September 1857 and early May 1858.

10 Walt Whitman to Charles M. Skinner, January 19, 1885. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive*, ID: loc.03812.

11 "Athletic Men Wanted—An Article for the Old and Young, for Doctors, Teachers, &c.," *Atlas* (December 26, 1858), 4-5.

12 For more information on the method and the comparison corpora used, see: Stefan Schöberlein and Zachary Turpin, "'Glorious Times for Newspaper Editors and Correspondents': Whitman at the *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, 1848–1849," *WWQR* 39 (Summer 2021), 1-39. We employed a "most frequent character trigrams" approach in the "classify"-function of the toolkit *stylo* for R, using three different statistical measures of distance, on incrementally growing lists of top 200 to top 2000 most frequent character trigrams. The percentage of attributions to Whitman by measure of distance are: 100% for Support Vector Machines, 93% for Delta, and 73% for Nearest Shrunken Centroid.

13 "[N]ewspapers needed their columns filled, and Whitman was good at filling them" (Zachary Turpin, "'Manly Health and Training' and the New York *Atlas*," *Walt Whitman Archive*, ed. Matt Cohen, Ed Folsom, and Kenneth M. Price).

14 *Atlas* (August 15, 1858), 6.

15 See, for example, pieces likely by Whitman in *Life Illustrated*, including "The Opera," November 10, 1855; "America's Mightiest Inheritance," April 12, 1856; "School Discipline," April 26, 1856; and his series "New York Dissected," July-August, 1856.

16 It reads in full: “Severe or long-sustained thought is injurious both by the direct over-excitement of the brain, and by leaving less nervous energy available for carrying on the ordinary vital processes. Occasional strain on the mind may be little felt in health, when the powers of nature are quickly restored by food, rest, sleep, and variety of occupation. In time, however, over-exertion of thought will tell unfavorably on the strongest constitution. Literary men and others who are subject to constant mental fatigue are rarely healthy or long-lived, except through extraordinary care and prudence, for which such persons, with all their knowledge, are seldom remarkable. It is very common to find hard students and laborious thinkers men of feeble or irritable nerves and general debility of system. The same wearing effect of the mind appears in the fate of those who have been precociously clever or studious. Life is generally short when the mental faculties are early developed and imprudently tasked in youth. There are also dangers to health in the opposite extreme of indolence and inactivity of mind. It is with the mind very much as with the body, moderate exercise is conducive to health, while over-fatigue or inactivity are both unfavorable” (*Atlas* [July 27, 1858], 3).

17 *Atlas* (December 19, 1858), 6.

18 Trent Collection of Whitmaniana, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, MS 4 to 148; Frey p. 66, item 24. The clipping argues against an over- or under-exertion of the brain and connects Greek philosophers’ long lives to how they “altered their time between abstruse studies . . . and conversations and speeches in the midst of their fellow-citizens in the open air.” The clipping ends on this note: “Plato died at 81, Xenocrates at 82, Thales at 89 and Democritus at 100.” “Manly Health” includes a similar list: “Plato lived to be 81 years of age, Diogenes 90, Democritus 100, Zeno 102.” Given the often highly divergent life-span estimates for ancient thinkers as well as the clearly mirrored sentence structure, this clipping must constitute a source for “Manly Health,” specifically, the “Brain Action” section—and its central argument can already be located months prior to that in the *Atlas*. See “Effect of Literary Occupation Upon the Duration of Life,” *Harper’s Weekly* 1.3 (January 17, 1857), 34.

19 “A Reviewer and a Poet,” *Atlas* (November 25, 1855), 2. It should also be noted that even prior, the *Atlas* kept its readers apprised of Whitman’s professional development, praising his work for the New Orleans *Crescent* as “capital” and calling him a “gentleman” (“New Orleans Daily Crescent,” [May 14, 1848], 2), noting the founding of the *Freeman* (“Free-Soil Paper,” [September 10, 1848], 2) and the *Salesman* (“New Paper in Brooklyn,” [June 8, 1851], 2).

20 “She . . . [is] of course entirely unacquainted with ‘Don Juan,’ though, singularly enough the volume (her property) always opens to that naughty poem. And when, on one occasion, your copy of Walt Whitman’s ‘Leaves of Grass’ disappeared for three whole days, she it was who brought it to you, having discovered it behind the sofa, where it had unaccountably slipped” (“New York Boarding Houses,” *Atlas* [July 12, 1857], 1). In Gunn’s book, this passage appears on pages 105-106 (New York: Mason Brothers, 1857).

21 “Items of Local Interest,” *Atlas* (April 3, 1859), 4.

22 For a short obituary, see “Death of Dr. William Porter Ray,” *The New-York Times* (March 5, 1864), 3.

23 The reason for his canonical suspension is only described as “circumstances” that came to the church administrators’ attention in 1858 (*The Protestant Episcopal Quarterly Review, and Church Register*, vol. 5 [New York: H Dyer, 1858], 571). In a letter to the editor of the *Episcopal Recorder*, Ray defends himself by saying the oddly phrased dismissal “notice may leave a false impression,” and that he “was suspended . . . for no criminal or immoral conduct, as those terms are employed in the

ordinary speech of men, but for alleged eccentricities of character, peculiar theological opinions, and cosmopolitan habits which have been acquired through my German education and long continental travels” (“Messrs. Editors,” *Episcopal Recorder* [September 18, 1858], 98).

24 For example: “to borrow an apt expression from Walt Whitman” (A Peripatetic, “Fourteen Thousand Miles Afoot,” *Atlas* [July 10, 1859], 1); “The greater part of his [Osborne’s] jokes, like Walt Whitman’s poetry, will not bear recital to a promiscuous audience” (A Peripatetic, “Fourteen Thousand Miles Afoot,” *Atlas* [February 27, 1859], 1); “The shade . . . began to make me feel, like Walt Whitman, infernally lazy” (A Peripatetic, “Fourteen Thousand Miles Afoot,” *Atlas* [July 10, 1859], 2); etc.

25 *Leaves of Grass Imprints: American and European Criticisms on “Leaves of Grass,”* ed. Walt Whitman (Boston: Thayer & Eldridge, 1860), 51-52.

26 The *Atlas* was not the first weekly paper that Whitman used for self-promotion. See, for example, from *Life Illustrated*, a review of *Leaves of Grass* from July 28, 1855; “Annihilation of Walt Whitman,” December 15, 1855; “Walt Whitman’s Article,” April 12, 1856; a reprinting of a positive review by Fanny Fern, May 17, 1856; and an announcement of the appearance of the second edition from August 16, 1856. *Life Illustrated* was owned by Fowler and Wells, the publisher of Whitman’s second edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

27 A Peripatetic, “Fourteen Thousand Miles Afoot,” *Atlas* (May 15, 1859), 1.

28 Whitman discussed his publishing frustrations and desire to bring out a third edition of *Leaves of Grass* in a July 20, 1857, letter to Philadelphia abolitionist and Fourierist Sarah Thorn Tyndale (1792-1859): “Fowler and Wells are bad persons for me.—They retard my book very much.—It is worse than ever. I wish now to bring out a third edition—I have now a hundred poems ready (the last edition had thirty-two.)—and shall endeavor to make an arrangement with some publisher here to take the plates from F. & W. and make the additions needed, and so bring out the third edition.” See Walt Whitman, *The Correspondence*, ed. Edwin Haviland Miller (New York: New York University Press, 1961–1977), 1:44.

29 Considering Whitman’s turn towards health (“Manly Health”) and self-help pseudoscience (animal magnetism, phrenology) in these years, William Porter Ray deserves more scrutiny from Whitman scholars. A Harvard-educated medical professional turned religious scholar turned rambling writer with a penchant for religiously-justified transgressiveness almost reads like a foreshadowing of Whitman’s later relationship with Richard Maurice Bucke. Perhaps it was likewise a productive one.

30 “Patent Hash,” *Atlas* (March 4, 1860), 1.

31 “Japan Embassy Coming,” *Atlas* (April 1, 1860), 1. The unsigned piece echoes Harrington’s signed critique of Whitman as “author of Bosh” by translating one of his most famous terms: “A Yawp (Japan for Bosh).”

32 It is titled “Soul-Gush—A Poemet” and parodies Whitman’s work in the *Saturday Press*. It reads: “How is it I live and don’t live, yet breathe and move, / Considering that I consider the weary; / Stretch of illimitable stuff which, soiling the snow / Whiteness of the ruled papyrus pure and unstained, / That I scribble on, cannot understood be by me. Oh yes! ah! me!— / The inscrutable great, like a beauteous halo around the bright brow of some saint martyred, / And all that. Awake! ah, soul slumber disturbed at last. / To and fro for a single ray of mind light softly sprinkles spray like / My life. Wherefore, ah! No! Stuff! The soul is gushed at last” (“Patent Hash,” *Atlas* [February 26, 1860], 1).

33 In November, about seven months after the Boston firm of Thayer and Eldridge published the third edition of *Leaves*, Whitman is explicitly dubbed the author of a “dirty” book in the *Atlas*. Reacting to the news that the *New York Saturday Press*, a bohemian newspaper edited by Henry Clapp Jr., was folding for financial reasons, a writer for the *Atlas* seems to partly blame the *Press*’s demise on Whitman, writing, “All the world does not . . . appreciate [the *Press*’s] continual puffs of Walt Whitman’s dirty ‘Leaves of Grass” (“Alas! Poor ‘Saturday Press,’” [November 17, 1860], 1). For an excellent analysis of this piece in the *Atlas* and a consideration of puffing in the *Press* and the larger implications of the practice for the late-antebellum New York literary marketplace, see Leif Eckstrom, “On Puffing: The *Saturday Press* and the Circulation of Symbolic Capital,” *Whitman Among the Bohemians*, ed. Edward Whitley and Joanna Levin (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 53-74.

34 “Patent Hash,” *Atlas* (April 8, 1860), 6.

35 It is telling, however, that Harrington speculates about a lecture here, which echoes Whitman’s (likely unrealized) plans for becoming a traveling lecturer—either of his “The Eighteenth Presidency!” or “Manly Health”—in these years. Even the false information seems to disclose knowledge about the poet that was not widely publicly available.

36 See Stefan Schöberlein and Stephanie M. Blalock “‘A Story of New York at the Present Time’: The Historico-Literary Contexts of *Jack Engle*,” *WWQR* 37 (Winter/Spring 2020), 157-162.

37 In a series of autobiographical notes, Whitman mentions a “Covert” and associates him with a “swindle” at the Whitman family home. See Whitman’s “Nehemiah Whitman” notebook, c. 1845-1861, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library. Available on the *Whitman Archive*. Edward Grier proposes that the villainous lawyer “Adam Covert,” a character in Whitman’s short story “Revenge and Requitall,” (a tale Whitman drew on when composing his novel *Life and Adventures of Jack Engle* [1852]) might be based on the lawyer “Richard Covert” of Brooklyn. See Whitman, *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*. ed. Edward Grier (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 3:1087.

38 “Trouble in Hoboken,” *Atlas* (January 11, 1857), 2.

39 The earliest reference to Whitman’s editorship at the *Daily Times* calls him the *de facto* editor (“Walt. Whitman was, by no means, the first *de facto* editor of the Times”). See *Brooklyn Daily Times*, (November 10, 1864), 2. As a “de facto” editor of a daily paper like the *Times*, Whitman could have also had time to edit a weekly paper like the *Atlas*. Likewise, the owner of the *Times*, George C. Bennett, took an active role in the production of the paper, which likely also diminished the time Whitman dedicated to day-to-day production duties.

40 Quoted in Ed Folsom, “Introduction,” *Song of Myself: With a Complete Commentary* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016), 3.