

THE NEVERSINK LIBRARY



**SPECIMEN DAYS AND COLLECT**  

---

**WALT WHITMAN**

INTRODUCTION BY LESLIE JAMISON

## PRAISE FOR WALT WHITMAN AND *SPECIMEN DAYS AND COLLECT*

---

“He is a great poet, our first, and it is unlikely indeed that his contribution to what it literally means to be an American poet will ever be equaled.”

—ROBERT CREELEY

“I like or love Whitman unreservedly; he operates with great power and beauty over a very wide range.”

—JOHN BERRYMAN

“Whitman’s plan was to display an ideal democrat, not to devise a theory.”

—JORGE LUIS BORGES

“I know no writer whose vision is as inclusive, as all-embracing as Whitman’s.”

—HENRY MILLER

“Whitman has gone further, in actual living expression, than any man, it seems to me.”

—D. H. LAWRENCE

“Whitman was probably the first person in America who was not ashamed of the fact that he thought things that were as big as the Universe.”

—ALLEN GINSBERG

“His discovery of himself is a discovery of America; he is able to give it to anyone who reaches his lines.”

—MURIEL RUKEYS

“I believe that long before Whitman came on the scene, ever since Milton in fact, poets writing in English unconsciously hungered for such a music as Whitman was to discover.”

—GALWAY KINNELL

**WALTER “WALT” WHITMAN** (1819–1892) was born on May 31, 1819, in Huntington, New York. He left school at age eleven and went to work, first as an office boy, then as a printer, devil and compositor at numerous newspapers in New York City—he even founded his own paper, the *Long Islander*, but sold it after ten months. His first publications were poems published anonymously in the *New York Mirror*. In the early 1850s, he began work on a collection of poetry, *Leaves of Grass*, which he paid to have printed at a local print shop. He would continue to revise the book over the course of his life, publishing by some counts nine different editions. The first edition was immediately polarizing: critics condemned it for its frankness about sexuality and its free-verse style. But others, like Ralph Waldo Emerson, saw in it a brilliant and uniquely American voice—in a letter thanking him for the book, Emerson wrote, “I greet you at the beginning of a great career.” In 1862, in the midst of the Civil War, Whitman left New York and headed south to search for his brother George, who had been wounded at the Battle of Fredericksburg. Whitman found him safe and sound, but was so deeply affected by the sight of the devastation wrought by the war that he moved to Washington, D.C., and volunteered as a nurse in army hospitals. He also had a series of government jobs, including working for the Secretary of the Interior—who subsequently fired Whitman on “moral grounds,” purportedly after reading *Leaves of Grass*. In the period after the war, Whitman published another collection of poetry, *Drum-Taps*, and the influential essay, “Democratic Vistas.” In 1873, he moved to his brother’s house in Camden, New Jersey, to recover from a stroke. He would spend his final years there, surrounded by visitors and friends, among them Oscar Wilde and Thomas Eakins. When he died at the age of seventy-two, thousands followed his funeral procession.

**LESLIE JAMISON** is the author of a collection of essays, *The Empathy Exams*, and a novel, *The Gin Closet*. She is a regular columnist for *The New York Times Book Review*.



---

## THE NEVERSINK LIBRARY

*I was by no means the only reader of books on board the Neversink. Several other sailors were diligent readers, though their studies did not lie in the way of belles-lettres. Their favourite authors were such as you may find at the book-stalls around Fulton Market; they were slightly physiologic in their nature. My book experiences on board of the frigate proved an example of a fact which every booklover must have experienced before me, namely, that though public libraries have a stately and imposing air, and doubtless contain invaluable volumes, yet, somehow, the books that prove most agreeable, grateful, and companionable, are those we pick up by chance here and there; those which seem put into our hands by Providence; those which pretend to little, but abound in much. —HERMANN MELVILLE*

MELVILLE, *WHITE JACKET*

---

# **SPECIMEN DAYS AND COLLECT**

---

**WALT WHITMAN**

INTRODUCTION BY LESLIE JAMISON



**MELVILLE HOUSE PUBLISHING**  
BROOKLYN · LONDON

Originally published by Reed Welsh & Co., Philadelphia, 1882

Copyright © 2014 by Melville House

Introduction copyright © 2014 by Leslie Jamison

First Melville House printing: November 2014

Melville House Publishing

145 Plymouth Street

Brooklyn, NY 11201

and

8 Blackstock Mews

Islington

London N4 2BT

[mhpbooks.com](http://mhpbooks.com) [facebook.com/mhpbooks](https://facebook.com/mhpbooks) @melvillehouse

Library of Congress

Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Whitman, Walt, 1819–1892.

[Prose works. Selections]

Specimen days; & Collect / Walt Whitman; introduction by Leslie Jamison.

pages cm — (Neversink)

ISBN 978-1-61219-386-1 (paperback)

ISBN 978-1-61219-387-8 (ebook)

1. Whitman, Walt, 1891–1892—Diaries. 2. Poets, American—19th century—Diaries. 3. United States—History—Civil War, 1861–1865—Personal narratives. 4. United States—History—Civil War, 1861–1865—Hospitals. 5. United States—Civilization—19th century. I. Jamison, Leslie, 1983– II. Whitman, Walt, 1819–1892. Specimen days. III. Whitman, Walt, 1819–1892. Collect. IV. Title. V. Title: Specimen days and Collect.

PS3220.A1 2014

818 .308—dc23

20140315

Design by Christopher King

Cover photograph: Walt Whitman, 1863. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

v3.1

---

# CONTENTS

*Cover*

*About the Authors*

*Title Page*

*Copyright*

Introduction by Leslie Jamison

*Specimen Days.*

*Collect.*

Notes Left Over.

Appendix. Pieces in Early Youth. 1834-'42.

# INTRODUCTION

---

## BY LESLIE JAMISON

What is *Specimen Days*? It doesn't sit easily in any genre. It's restless in its recounting. Structurally, it's a collection of prose fragments written across two decades of Walt Whitman's life: his hospital visits during the Civil War; his recovery from a paralyzing stroke; his jaunts through the broad western states of America; his delight at trees and moths and glow-worms; his disappointment at the posturing of prairie women. In his own words, it's "mélange of loafing, looking, hobbling, sitting, traveling—a little thinking thrown in for sale but very little—... wild and free and somewhat acrid—indeed more like cedar-plums than you might guess at first glance."

This is signature Whitman, deploying the rhetoric of explanation to make everything more mysterious: *more like cedar-plums than you might guess at first glance*. He's right, of course: Whitman hadn't imagined this book like cedar-plums at all. After helpfully describing what cedar-plums *are* (bunches of "china-blue" berries that grow along the cedar's "thick woolly tufts") Whitman explains that they resemble the book in "their uselessness growing wild—... the soil whence they come—their content in being let alone—their stolid and deaf repugnance to answering questions." Questions like the one that opened this introduction: *What ARE you anyway?* We are invited to imagine the cedar-plums hanging there, blank-faced, refusing our inquiries.

It's a question perhaps best answered by way of list. The book is full of them—lists of trees, lists of cities—and other accumulations, joyous and jarring: summer pleasures, urban streetscapes, bodies strewn across battlefields. The form of the list offered Whitman a kind of honesty in its refusal to imply any false totality or polish: it was just a rough accounting, a ledger of the war dead, a catalog of the world.

Whitman initially journeyed to the battlefields of the Civil War for personal reasons. After seeing a name he feared was his brother George's listed among wartime casualties, in December 1862, he headed to Fredericksburg, where he discovered George had only suffered minor facial lacerations. But this was just the beginning: Whitman started visiting soldiers in hospitals—tens of thousands, all told—and doing what he could: writing letters to families, dressing wounds, bringing treats—rice pudding or blackberry syrup. (He once distributed ice cream to all eighteen wards of Carver Hospital.) The relationships he formed, as evidenced by the tender letters he exchanged with many of his charges, were a strange mixture of fraternal, paternal, and amorous. He wanted to demonstrate affection, bring cheer, and bear witness. On August 10, 1863, he wrote to the parents of a soldier named Erastus Haskell, sick with typhoid: "I write you this letter, because I would do something at least in his memory—his fate was a hard one, to die so— He is one of the thousands of our unknown American young men in the ranks about whom there is no record or fame, no fuss made about their dying so unknown."

We can read the Civil War material in *Specimen Days* as a record of these unknown deaths.



—a fuss made, finally—though its fragments also confess the impossibility of expressing the full scale of this loss. One section is titled “The Real War Will Never Get in the Books” and another, called “The Million Dead, Too, Summ’d Up,” offers its corpses in fragmentary bursts of exclamation: “The dead in this war—there they lie, strewing the fields—... the varieties of the *strayed* dead, ... the crops reap’d by the mighty reapers, typhoid, dysentery, inflammation—... the corpses floated down the rivers ...” And on and on.

And yet *Specimen Days* insists upon the robust natural world as companion and aftermath to this suffering, not by argument so much as juxtaposition. Much of the bliss of this book lives in its particulars: watching kingfishers with their milk-white necks splashing water into jets of diamonds; appreciating the “sea-prairies” of salt-grass meadows on the Jersey shore or a field of “malachite green” cabbages, watching a squirming flotilla of red worms wriggling out of the soil after a rainstorm, finding the white-flowering wild carrot, appreciating the “double brightness” of nighttime fishermen’s candles floating on the sea.

Whitman’s democratic awe is distinctive not simply for its range and its exuberance and its surprise, but for its willingness to dwell—to unfurl a pleasure fully. “Let me say more about the song of the locust, even to repetition,” he says, and does—“like a brass disk whirling round and round.” He also loves the sound of ice giving way to sunlight, and isn’t afraid to parse the pleasure: the “occasional crunch and cracking of the ice-glare congeal’d over the creek, as it gives way to the sunbeams—sometimes with low sigh—sometimes with indignant obstinate tug and snort.”

Part of our pleasure in reading his book, in turn, is not just feeling close to his sensorial perceptions, but feeling invited more deeply into our own—to feel the world more fully in all its snorting ice and malachite cabbages and whirling locusts and wriggling worms. For Whitman, rehabilitating from a stroke years after the war—with his self-designed program of physical therapy, taking mud baths and wrestling with young trees—nature was a kind of nursemaid: “How it all nourishes, lulls me, in the way most needed; the open air, the ryegrass fields, the apple orchards.” In this way, we see how some specimen days give way to others—it’s no longer Whitman ministering to soldiers but nature ministering to Whitman, inviting him back into the physical wonder of the world after he had been so willing to dwell so long—so deeply, so unbearably—with the most unimaginable kind of physical damage. These “blood-smutch’d little notebooks” don’t let us forget the war, but they don’t let us forget the world that survived it either.

In fact, this book wants to hold as much of that surviving world as it can. It wants to hold the trees—“Persimmons ... Hornbeam ... Gum-trees, both sweet and sour”—and the blossoms, especially the most wild—“wild honeysuckle, wild roses ... wild geranium”—and even the “friendly weeds” of its author’s daily strolls: “snakeroot ... dandelions ... bloodroot.” It wants to honor everything. In the section called “A Civility Too Long Neglected,” Whitman announces that he wants to dedicate the second half of his book to the creatures he celebrates in its pages: water-snakes, mosquitoes, peppermint, moths “great and little.” But the dedication is bursting at the seams; it wants to grasp too much. He dedicates the book to “crows (and all other birds),” “tulip-trees (and all other trees).” The whole thing dissolves in

an effusion of incandescent worms: “glow-worms, (swarming millions of them indescribably strange and beautiful at night).” This indecision is the mark and signature of his attention. His poetry isn’t the poetry of choosing *between*; it’s the poetry of inclusion and accumulation. The world is everywhere, the song electric in everything: the coarse and the crude beside the fine, the gritty and the dirty beside the polished.

It makes sense, then, that alongside *Specimen Days* we get *Collect*, a heterogeneous gathering of other texts: several prologues to *Leaves of Grass*, including the original 1855 edition (a fine piece of prose in its own right), various pieces of critical writing that not only subtly suggest Whitman’s sense of his own central role in the culture: (“Strange as it may seem, the topmost proof of a race is its own born poetry”), and “Democratic Vistas” on Whitman’s take on the failures and possibilities of American democracy in the wake of the Civil War.

“The *Collect* afterward gathers up the odds and ends of whatever pieces I can now lay hands on,” Whitman explained, “... and swoops all together like fish in a net.” It might gather them like fish in a net, but it manages to keep them live—swimming, breathing, glimmering—because it doesn’t ask them to perform a kind of thematic coherence that isn’t organic to their natures.

There is something glorious about the scattered thematic concerns of both *Collect* and *Specimen Days*—the way their unabashed ranging feels organic to the workings of a mind in all its wanderings. In a list of alternate titles, Whitman honors the volume’s stubborn refusal of genre: Not only the charmingly awkward *Cedar-Plums Like* (for by-now obvious reasons) but *As the Wild Bee Hums in May; Away from Books—away from Art; Notes of a half-Paralytic; Ducks and Drakes; Gossip at Early Candle-light; Sands on the Shore of 64* (he was sixty-three); *Life-Mosaic ... Native Moments; Again and Again*. It’s this final title—the last in Whitman’s list of thirty-five—that intrigues me most: *Again and Again*. He wanted to do justice to repetition and ongoingness, the *again and again* of life, the constant onslaught of impressions in all their constancy and incoherence. He was open to meaning at every moment. It was tiring; it was joyous.

Finally, of course, Whitman chose the title *Specimen Days*, but for him the notion of specimen wasn’t anything clinical or dissecting; it was a mode of celebration. He wanted to preserve “specimen interiors” from his “strange, unloosen’d, wondrous time”; he wanted to commemorate “a regular Irish boy, a fine specimen of youthful physical manliness—shining through the lungs—inevitably dying.” Specimens exemplified ideals and represented the possibilities of citizenship and masculinity, being an individual in a collective. Types weren’t a way of reducing anyone so much as a way of organizing the world’s abundance. Whitman was on the lookout everywhere for specimens to praise. (Except Kansas City, where he found the women lacking the “high native originality of spirit or body” he saw evident in their male counterparts—instead they seem “dyspeptic-looking and generally doll-like.”) He returned the specimen to its etymological roots: the Latin word for “that by which a thing is known” means of knowing,” from the verb *specere*, “to look at.” Specimens, for Whitman, weren’t just about typicality and representative capacity; they were a way of learning—re-learning—how to see.

“There Was a Child Went Forth,” a poem Whitman once called “the most innocent thing

ever did,” begins by envisioning perception as a kind of union:

---

There was a child went forth every day;  
And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became;  
And that object became part of him for the day, or a certain part of the day,  
or for many years, or stretching cycles of years.

*Specimen Days* is Whitman's attempt to document all the objects that become part of him across the course of one stretching cycle. In these fragments, he is perpetually fascinated by the possibility of absorbing the world and being absorbed by it. Describing the Jersey shoreline—trying to do justice to that horizon where ocean meets sky—he writes that he would be “quite satisfied if I could indirectly show that we have met and fused, even if only once, but enough—that we have really absorb'd each other and understand each other.”

Many of his musings in these pages resonate with his poetry in rewarding ways: his lyrical refusal of dualism and his insistence on bodily experience, his constant celebration of visceral encounters and his pursuit of radical democratic intimacy. His close attention to bodily experience in *Specimen Days*—from the bliss of wandering nude through sunny grasslands to the horrors of amputated bodies during war—is born of the same voice that gave us “I Sing the Body Electric”: “And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?” His focus on bodily experience isn't solipsistic, a cloistered exploration of private experience, so much as a way of exploring commonality: “The thin red jellies within you or within me” are always understood as shared. His specimen days could populate the life of anyone. Their rapture and their pain—the veneration of the footless soldier or the humble peppermint moth—could belong to anyone. These are private days meant as public offerings.

The visions of war in *Specimen Days* resonate strongly with *Drum-Taps*, Whitman's Civil War poems. We see piles of amputated limbs and boys moaning from pain in the night. We see the remains of their fallen comrades: “their skeletons, bleach'd bones, tufts of hair, button fragments of clothing.” We see formal fragments as well: the broken, dash-strewn fields of violence, their jagged grammar. We see an ethos of care, a vision of Whitman's ministrations that echoes poems like “The Wound-Dresser”: “From the stump of the arm, the amputated hand, / I undo the clotted lint, remove the slough, wash off the matter and blood.” We see drafts of the intimacies—“He behaved very manly and affectionate. The kiss I gave him as he was about leaving he return'd fourfold”—that in his poems swell into lyric superlatives: “poor boy! I never knew you, / Yet I think I could not refuse this moment to die for you, if that would save you.”

*If that would save you.* But it couldn't. Which Whitman understood: “I do not see that I can do much good to these wounded and dying,” he wrote. He also understood that his immortalizing of these boys wouldn't compensate for their deaths. In the prose of *Specimen Days*, we hear a sharper sense of futility in Whitman's voice than in his poetry, the sense that he can't adequately evoke even a fraction of their suffering. We see more doubt and ambivalence about the limits of expression: “No history ever—no poem sings, no music sounds, those bravest men of all—those deeds.”

Which didn't mean he stopped trying. Indeed, there was something that got absolute *fierce* in his desire for us to understand—his readers now, his readers then, his readers always and whenever. At moments, his language nearly shatters, hurling itself against hyperbole, in order to give us some sense of what it won't ever be able to convey:

“Multiply the above by scores, aye hundreds—verify it in all the forms that different circumstances, individuals, places, countries afford—light it with every lurid passion, the wolf's, the lion's lapping thirst for blood—the passionate, boiling volcanoes of human revenge for comrades, brothers slain—with the light of burning farms, and heaps of smutting, smouldering black embers—and in the human heart everywhere black, worse embers—and you have an inkling of this war.”

There's something almost charming in this desperate plea—this sense that if only we could summon “the lion's lapping thirst for blood” we could get some handle on this suffering. The tension here, asking readers to get closer to some “inkling of this war” while understanding they'll never fully absorb it (“the real war will never get in the books”), is kin to another tension that weaves through these pages: the call for a kind of negative capability from his readers.

In John Keats's formulation, negative capability is “when a man is capable of being in uncertainty, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.” This capacity to hold mystery and uncertainty is key to Whitman's understanding of the war, and key to his insistence that we experience the brutality of the war alongside visions of peaceful sparkling creeks, healthy young saplings, blissful days in the woods. Even during the war, his vision moves back and forth from wounded soldiers to white Capitol buildings gleaming under the moonlight, from bloody stumps to the finery of an inaugural ball. These juxtapositions hold an implicit statement about what constitutes democratic vision—and the suggestion that Whitman's vision of citizenship, the kind of vision required by citizenship, means seeing all of it.

After describing the remains of the dead, their “bleach'd bones” and buttons, Whitman insists that their corpses will continue to compose the nation: “shall be so forever, in every future grain of wheat and ear of corn, and every flower that grows, and every breath we draw ... Northern dead leavening Southern soil [and] Southerners, crumble to-day Northern earth.” His poem “This Compost,” written before the war but oddly prescient in its vision, considers the soil in similar terms: “Behold this compost! behold it well! Perhaps every mite has once form'd part of a sick person—yet behold!” He was obsessed with the notion that nature, his source of joy and respite, was also full of death. It made him uneasy. It offered no easy resolution: “Now I am terrified at the Earth, it is that calm and patient, ... It turns harmless and stainless on its axis, with such endless successions of diseas'd corpses /... It gives such divine materials to men, and accepts such leavings from them at last.”

Whitman may have been “terrified” by the land's impervious recycling, but his own publishing history offers something analogous to this compost: not just the internal composition of *Specimen Days*, in which a series of “leavings” form a kind of textual soil, but also the eventual inclusion of his Civil War poems in his evolving magnum opus. The 1860 *Leaves of Grass* bore more than a faint resemblance to compost—*more like cedar-plums than you might guess at first glance*. It was a ragged volume, four separately paginated books bound between the same two covers, that offered an archaeology of citizenship: various eras and

flavors of national experience. It was a collection of parts fit loosely into a whole. In this sense, it fit the times. America was a bundled collection of states, bound but strained.

In *Specimen Days*, Whitman offers a reflection that helps to explain why he would insist on folding his civil war poetry into *Leaves of Grass*. Describing his experience caring for wounded soldiers, he says: “I now doubt whether one can get a fair idea of what this war practically is or what genuine America is, and her character, without some such experience as this I am having.” Put plainly: In order to know the nation, you have to know her corpses.

Even as Whitman celebrates what it means to remember the war dead during peacetime—“nothing gloomy or depressing in such cases—on the contrary, as reminiscences, I find them soothing, bracing, tonic”—we sense that it’s more complicated, we hear echoes of his lyric disquiet: *I am terrified at the Earth, it is that calm and patient ... It turns harmless and stainless on its axis, with such endless successions of diseas’d corpses*. “Bracing” and “tonic” are telling words; they don’t corroborate “soothing” so much as they resist it. (This was one of Whitman’s great pleasures, offering chains of conflicting adjectives whose cadences strung them together with deceptive grace. It was another kind of negative capability on the level of diction itself.) “Tonic,” with its medicinal and restorative connotations, comes originally from the Greek—*tonikos*, of stretching—suggesting a kind of restoration that also pushes us past comfort.

Whitman’s juxtapositions aren’t easy, but they’re full of a faith that doesn’t feel cheap. Exploring Virginia in 1864, during the thick of the war, he admired the health of the land itself—“The skies and atmosphere most luscious ... I should say very healthy, as a general thing ... The sun rejoices in his strength”; everywhere we see this appreciation for what was robust around him, even at the epicenter of so much spilled blood. This wasn’t a failure to respect the gravity of the violence so much as an homage to the vitality it threatened.

Whitman resisted the idea that profundity had to dwell in darkness: “I, too, like the rest feel these modern tendencies ... to turn everything to pathos, ennui, morbidity, dissatisfaction, death.” But he found something beyond these dark veins: “the marrow in the bones [and] The exquisite realization of health” that close “I Sing the Body Electric.” The sense of our wondrous marrow—the body as soul—offers another way into the phenomenon of Whitman’s specimens: not as a crude appraisal of types or bodies, but as an attempt to celebrate and catalog all the souls he could find—humans and animals and trees and days and nights and stars. It was an act of gathering ghosted by the specter of national loss. His exaltation at healthy bodies, his obsession with the health and beauty of the land—these fixations were an honoring of what suffering had stolen. His specimens mapped what had been lost, and offered an inventory of what remained.

I had a home full of specimens, once. I spent a year of my life living with one of my closest friends after we’d both weathered the end of long relationships. We’d both lost homes we spent years trying to build, and so we built a new one together, our living room decorated with her collection of globes (she is a travel writer) and my collection of old medical slides—small slips of glass with sepia labels: TONGUE OF FROG, BLADDER OF CAT, GNAT’S EYE. We loved those slides because they partitioned the world into miniature enchantments and we were looking for this kind of enchantment. We needed it. We were shadowed by the past; we needed to remember that the world was full of what we hadn’t yet discovered. We needed to be reminded of the malachite

in cabbages, the glow in certain worms, the doubled brightness of fishing lanterns over ink waters. *How it all nourishes, in the way most needed.*

Once a week we cooked a minor feast—roasted vegetables and heaping grains and spices, tea and sliced fruit—and set out candles, switched on our salt lamp, talked for hours. We called these Specimen Nights—in honor of Whitman’s collection of days, his gathering of nerve endings—and we marked each of these evenings by choosing an old medical slide and hanging it on our wall, beneath a quote copied from these pages: *Out of the sane, silent, beautiful, and beautiful miracles that envelope and fuse me—trees, water, grass, sunlight, and early frost—the one I am looking at most to-day is the sky.*

*Specere.* Those nights we were practicing seeing our own lives differently. We were harvesting glints from our days and offering them to each other, honoring what might have otherwise felt transitional or provisional or logistical—train commutes and difficult student giddy first dates and mediocre ones, the early expiration dates of un-lived futures—all of this in the glow of the right salt lamp, also part of the mystery and grace of trusting our evolving and unprogrammed lives.

Which gets to what I’ve found in *Specimen Days*, and why I’ve read it more than once, which I’ll no doubt keep returning to it over the years to come: not just for its singular visions of the world—in war and peace, suffering and beauty, grandiosity and banality—but for the way it permits me, coaxes *from* me, a certain kind of vision too, expansive and honoring. It encourages a kind of piecemeal reading that feels permissive and forgiving.

This last time, I read it on the cusp between summer and fall, over the course of a month in which I was traveling quite frequently. I read it all over the world: by a diamond stand at the Dubai airport, on an overnight bus ride through Sri Lanka, in a concrete hot tub in the middle of a corporate Kentucky hotel; beneath the shadow of a bronze Nordic king in the dappled sunlight of Oslo’s Slottsparken; and at home—in the irritable humidity of the 4 train during rush hour, rattling under the East River, and at the counter of a diner on Third Avenue where an old woman ate cottage cheese for dinner, alone, tucked into a vinyl booth behind me.

I read this book in pieces, in all these places, and everywhere I was, it asked me to be sensitive to that place—to note its details, to remain alive to the way my body was coming into contact with everything else: *that object she became, and that object became part of her.* I went whale-watching in the middle of a rainstorm just offshore from Mirissa and paid attention to how it felt to get soaked—already drenched with rain, hit by each slapping wave, tasting the kind of salt I associate with weeping—and admired the determination of a woman beside me, clutching a plastic baggie of her own vomit but still determined to see a Blue even just a tail or fin. The sheer force of her desire was like another kind of natural phenomenon beside me. Whitman relished these energies; these ferocities in our beings.

Whitman wasn’t just alive to the wonders of the new or distant; he also knew how to appreciate home, the familiar, and how it could renew itself: “I do not believe any grand eligibility ever comes forth at first. In my own experience, (persons, poems, places, characters,) I discover the best hardly ever at first,... sometimes suddenly bursting forth, or stealthily opening to me, perhaps after years of unwitting familiarity, unappreciation, usage. Which is why I decided to carry *Specimen Days* through Brooklyn one day, the Brooklyn Whitman had wandered back when Joralemon Street was still surrounded by pastures. I walked with him—or rather, walked as I imagined he might have walked, in this Brooklyn s

different from the one he'd known.

I walked without headphones, without precise destination, along the broad expanse of Eastern Parkway. (Whitman was prone to praising the girth of thoroughfares; also prone to putting certain announcements—the end of the Civil War among them—in parentheses.) The trees were full of leaves just starting to yellow. What kind of trees? I'd never bothered to wonder before. I wondered now. (Later, I would look them up—all elms at first, then interspersed with maple, oak, and ash.) This kind of detail—knowing what was right in front of me—was another gift from Whitman: the contagion of curiosity, those nerve endings embedded in his transcription of the world. *I sing the body electric*. I thrilled at autumn in the air, its first crisp notes. I thrilled at the familiar curling awning of my favorite Mexican place, my regular subway stairs, my bodega and its many flavors of sparkling water. I felt myself turning sentimental about the season and the neighborhood—the rich generosity of each, only I could muster enough attention to inhabit them properly. This was Whitman's beat and passion, of course, this kind of inhabitation.

Everything turned to specimen before me as I walked: a man in a red suede jacket, an elderly guy with a bag full of rotting lettuce, a woman with bright pink running shoes, a mural I'd never noticed near the Franklin Shuttle entrance by the Botanic Gardens—white farmhouses with red trim and green fields painted around them like skirts, their flat acrylic world nothing like this one, with its bits of crumpled litter turning and scuttling in the wind, cabs honking, car stereos thumping the asphalt. Whitman's allegiance was so firmly to *this* world, in its mess and trash and grit and noise; his allegiance was to the toddler boy staring wide-eyed at the museum fountain, jets of water coming up and falling down, slapping the marble.

Whitman loved the world in its dross and guts and glitter, in its *everything*—the tulip tree and *all* trees, the glow worms and *all* worms. The long lines of his poems spoke his urgent need to craft a lyric that could hold it all. The *collect* was just another word for this desire: how can I gather all of these fragments in one place? Not just Brooklyn putting on its best show—sunlight sparkling and shattering off fountains—but also Brooklyn underground, grimy and gum-caked, where rats scamper between tossed cigarette butts and nose their way into the crumbed insides of crinkled potato chip bags.

“The days are full of sunbeams and oxygen,” Whitman wrote in August of 1880, and his gaze—for us, years later—still holds this robust balance in its cadences: pleasure without naïveté, relish without simplicity. In these pages, his vision still seeks pleasure and sustenance without blinding itself to anything, and there is a secular holiness—a sense of gratitude and consecration—in this way of speaking, this way of being alive.

# SPECIMEN DAYS.

---



---

A HAPPY HOUR'S COMMAND.

DOWN IN THE WOODS, *July 2d, 1882.*—If I do it at all I must delay no longer. Incongruous and full of skips and jumps as is that huddle of diary-jottings, war-memoranda of 1862-'65, Natural notes of 1877-'81, with Western and Canadian observations afterwards, all bundled up and tied by a big string, the resolution and indeed mandate comes to me this day, this hour, (and what a day! what an hour just passing! the luxury of riant grass and blowing breeze with all the shows of sun and sky and perfect temperature, never before so filling me body and soul)—to go home, untie the bundle, reel out diary-scrap and memoranda, just as they are, large or small, one after another, into print-pages,\* and let the melange's lackings and wants of connection take care of themselves. It will illustrate one phase of humanity anyhow how few of life's days and hours (and they not by relative value or proportion, but by chance) are ever noted. Probably another point too, how we give long preparations for some object, planning and delving and fashioning, and then, when the actual hour for doing arrives, find ourselves still quite unprepared, and tumble the thing together, letting hurry and crudeness tell the story better than fine work. At any rate I obey my happy hour's command which seems curiously imperative. May-be, if I don't do anything else, I shall send out the most wayward, spontaneous, fragmentary book ever printed.

ANSWER TO AN INSISTING FRIEND.

You ask for items, details of my early life—of genealogy and parentage, particularly of the women of my ancestry, and of its far back Netherlands stock on the maternal side—of the region where I was born and raised, and my father and mother before me, and theirs before them—with a word about Brooklyn and New York cities, the times I lived there as lad and young man. You say you want to get at these details mainly as the go-befores and embryos of *Leaves of Grass*. Very good; you shall have at least some specimens of them all. I have often thought of the meaning of such things—that one can only encompass and complete matters of that kind by exploring behind, perhaps very far behind, themselves directly, and so into the genesis, antecedents, and cumulative stages. Then as luck would have it, I lately whiled away the tedium of a week's half-sickness and confinement, by collating these very items for another (yet unfulfill'd, probably abandon'd,) purpose; and if you will be satisfied with their authentic in date-occurrence and fact simply, and told my own way, garrulous-like, here they are. I shall not hesitate to make extracts, for I catch at any thing to save labor; but those will be the best versions of what I want to convey.

GENEALOGY-VAN VELSOR AND WHITMAN.

The later years of the last century found the Van Velsor family, my mother's side, living on their own farm at Cold Spring, Long Island, New York State, near the eastern edge of Queens county, about a mile from the harbor.† My father's side—probably the fifth generation from the first English arrivals in New England—were at the same time farmers on their own land-

(and a fine domain it was, 500 acres, all good soil, gently sloping east and south, about on tenth woods, plenty of grand old trees,) two or three miles off, at West Hills, Suffolk county. The Whitman name in the Eastern States, and so branching West and South, started undoubtedly from one John Whitman, born 1602, in Old England, where he grew up unmarried, and his eldest son was born in 1629. He came over in the "True Love" in 1640 to America, and lived in Weymouth, Mass., which place became the mother-hive of the New Englanders of the name: he died in 1692. His brother, Rev. Zechariah Whitman, also came over in the "True Love," either at that time or soon after, and lived at Milford, Conn. A son of this Zechariah, named Joseph, migrated to Huntington, Long Island, and permanently settled there. Savage's "Genealogical Dictionary" (vol. iv, p. 524) gets the Whitman family establish'd at Huntington, per this Joseph, before 1664. It is quite certain that from the beginning, and from Joseph, the West Hill Whitmans, and all others in Suffolk county, have since radiated, myself among the number. John and Zechariah both went to England and back again divers times; they had large families, and several of their children were born in the old country. We hear of the father of John and Zechariah, Abijah Whitman, who goes over in the 1500's, but we know little about him, except that he also was for some time in America.

These old pedigree-remembrances come up to me vividly from a visit I made not long since (in my 63d year) to West Hills, and to the burial grounds of my ancestry, both sides. I extract from notes of that visit, written there and then:

#### THE OLD WHITMAN AND VAN VELSOR CEMETERIES.

*July 29, 1881.*—After more than forty years' absence, (except a brief visit, to take my father there once more, two years before he died,) went down Long Island on a week's jaunt to the place where I was born, thirty miles from New York city. Rode around the old familiar spots, viewing and pondering and dwelling long upon them, everything coming back to me. Went to the old Whitman homestead on the upland and took a view eastward, inclining south, over the broad and beautiful farm lands of my grandfather (1780,) and my father. There was the new house (1810,) the big oak a hundred and fifty or two hundred years old; there the well-kept sloping kitchen-garden, and a little way off even the well-kept remains of the dwelling of my great-grandfather (1750-'60) still standing, with its mighty timbers and low ceilings. Near by, a stately grove of tall, vigorous black-walnuts, beautiful, Apollo-like, the sons of grandsons, no doubt, of black-walnuts during or before 1776. On the other side of the road spread the famous apple orchard, over twenty acres, the trees planted by hands long mouldering in the grave (my uncle Jesse's,) but quite many of them evidently capable of throwing out their annual blossoms and fruit yet.

I now write these lines seated on an old grave (doubtless of a century since at least) on the burial hill of the Whitmans of many generations. Fifty and more graves are quite plainly traceable, and as many more decay'd out of all form—depress'd mounds, crumbled and broken stones, cover'd with moss—the gray and sterile hill, the clumps of chestnuts outside the silence, just varied by the sighing wind. There is always the deepest eloquence of sermon or poem in any of these ancient graveyards of which Long Island has so many; and what must this one have been to me? My whole family history, with its succession of links from the first settlement down to date, told here—three centuries concentrate on this sterile acre.

The next day, July 30, I devoted to the maternal locality, and if possible was still mo-

penetrated and impress'd. I write this paragraph on the burial hill of the Van Velsors, near Cold Spring, the most significant depository of the dead that could be imagin'd, without the slightest help from art, but far ahead of it, soil sterile, a mostly bare plateau-flat of half an acre, the top of a hill, brush and well grown trees and dense woods bordering all around, very primitive, secluded, no visitors, no road (you cannot drive here, you have to bring the dead on foot, and follow on foot.) Two or three-score graves quite plain; as many more almost rubb'd out. My grandfather Cornelius and my grandmother Amy (Naomi) and numerous relatives nearer or remoter, on my mother's side, lie buried here. The scene as I stood or sat, the delicate and wild odor of the woods, a slightly drizzling rain, the emotion of the atmosphere of the place, and the inferr'd reminiscences, were fitting accompaniments.

#### THE MATERNAL HOMESTEAD.

I went down from this ancient grave place eighty or ninety rods to the site of the Van Velsor homestead, where my mother was born (1795,) and where every spot had been familiar to me as a child and youth (1825-'40.) Then stood there a long rambling, dark-gray, shingled sided house, with sheds, pens, a great barn, and much open road-space. Now of all those not a vestige left; all had been pull'd down, erased, and the plough and harrow pass'd over the foundations, road-spaces and everything, for many summers; fenced in at present, and grass and clover growing like any other fine fields. Only a big hole from the cellar, with some little heaps of broken stone, green with grass and weeds, identified the place. Even the copious brook and spring seem'd to have mostly dwindled away. The whole scene, with what it arouse'd, memories of my young days there half a century ago, the vast kitchen and ample fireplace and the sitting-room adjoining, the plain furniture, the meals, the house full of merry people, my grandmother Amy's sweet old face in its Quaker cap, my grandfather "the Major," jovial, red, stout, with sonorous voice and characteristic physiognomy, with the actual sights themselves, made the most pronounc'd half-day's experience of my whole jaunt.

For there with all those wooded, hilly, healthy surroundings, my dearest mother, Louisa Van Velsor, grew up—(her mother, Amy Williams, of the Friends' or Quakers' denomination—the Williams family, seven sisters and one brother—the father and brother sailors, both of whom met their deaths at sea.) The Van Velsor people were noted for fine horses, which the men bred and train'd from blooded stock. My mother, as a young woman, was a daily and daring rider. As to the head of the family himself, the old race of the Netherlands, so deeply grafted on Manhattan island and in Kings and Queens counties, never yielded a more marked and full Americanized specimen than Major Cornelius Van Velsor.

#### TWO OLD FAMILY INTERIORS.

Of the domestic and inside life of the middle of Long Island, at and just before that time, here are two samples:

"The Whitmans, at the beginning of the present century, lived in a long story-and-a-half farm house, hugely timber'd, which is still standing. A great smoke-canopied kitchen, with vast hearth and chimney, form'd one end of the house. The existence of slavery in New York at that time, and the possession by the family of some twelve or fifteen slaves, house and field servants, gave things quite a patriarchal look. The very young darkies could be seen, a swar-

of them, toward sundown, in this kitchen, squatted in a circle on the floor, eating the supper of Indian pudding and milk. In the house, and in food and furniture, all was rude, but substantial. No carpets or stoves were known, and no coffee, and tea or sugar only for the women. Rousing wood fires gave both warmth and light on winter nights. Pork, poultry, beef, and all the ordinary vegetables and grains were plentiful. Cider was the men's common drink, and used at meals. The clothes were mainly homespun. Journeys were made by both men and women on horseback. Both sexes labor'd with their own hands—the men on the farm—the women in the house and around it. Books were scarce. The annual copy of the almanac was a treat, and was pored over through the long winter evenings. I must not forget to mention that both these families were near enough to the sea to behold it from the high places, and to hear in still hours the roar of the surf; the latter, after a storm, giving a peculiar sound at night. Then all hands, male and female, went down frequently on beach and bathing parties, and the men on practical expeditions for cutting salt hay, and for clamming and fishing.” —*John Burroughs's* NOTES.

“The ancestors of Walt Whitman, on both the paternal and maternal sides, kept a good table, sustain'd the hospitalities, decorums, and an excellent social reputation in the county, and they were often of mark'd individuality. If space permitted, I should consider some of the men worthy special description; and still more some of the women. His great-grandmother on the paternal side, for instance, was a large swarthy woman, who lived to a very old age. She smoked tobacco, rode on horseback like a man, managed the most vicious horse, and, becoming a widow in later life, went forth every day over her farm-lands, frequently in the saddle, directing the labor of her slaves, with language in which, on exciting occasions, oaths were not spared. The two immediate grandmothers were, in the best sense, superior women. The maternal one (Amy Williams before marriage) was a Friend, or Quakeress, of sweet and sensible character, housewifely proclivities, and deeply intuitive and spiritual. The other (Hannah Brush,) was an equally noble, perhaps stronger character, lived to be very old, had quite a family of sons, was a natural lady, was in early life a school-mistress, and had great solidity of mind. W. W. himself makes much of the women of his ancestry.” —*The same*.

Out from these arrieres of persons and scenes, I was born May 31, 1819. And now to dwell awhile on the locality itself—as the successive growth stages of my infancy, childhood, youth, and manhood were all pass'd on Long Island, which I sometimes feel as if I had incorporated. I roam'd, as boy and man, and have lived in nearly all parts, from Brooklyn to Montauk point.

#### PAUMANOK, AND MY LIFE ON IT AS CHILD AND YOUNG MAN.

Worth fully and particularly investigating indeed this Paumanok, (to give the spot its aboriginal name,\*) stretching east through Kings, Queens and Suffolk counties, 120 miles altogether—on the north Long Island sound, a beautiful, varied and picturesque series of inlets, “necks” and sea-like expansions, for a hundred miles to Orient point. On the ocean side the great south bay dotted with countless hummocks, mostly small, some quite large, and occasionally long bars of sand out two hundred rods to a mile-and-a-half from the shore.

While now and then, as at Rockaway and far east along the Hamptons, the beach makes right on the island, the sea dashing up without intervention. Several light-houses on the shore east; a long history of wrecks tragedies, some even of late years. As a youngster, I was in the atmosphere and traditions of many of these wrecks—of one or two almost an observer. On Hempstead beach for example, was the loss of the ship “Mexico” in 1840, (alluded to in “the Sleepers” in L. of G.) And at Hampton, some years later, the destruction of the brig “Elizabeth,” a fearful affair, in one of the worst winter gales, where Margaret Fuller went down, with her husband and child.

Inside the outer bars or beach this south bay is everywhere comparatively shallow; of course in winters all thick ice on the surface. As a boy I often went forth with a chum or two, on those frozen fields, with hand-sled, axe and eel-spear, after messes of eels. We would cut holes in the ice, sometimes striking quite an eel-bonanza, and filling our baskets with great, fat, sweet, white-meated fellows. The scenes, the ice, drawing the handsled, cutting holes, spearing the eels, &c., were of course just such fun as is dearest to boyhood. The shores of this bay, winter and summer, and my doings there in early life, are woven all through L. of G. One sport I was very fond of was to go on a bay-party in summer to gather sea-gull’s eggs. (The gulls lay two or three eggs, more than half the size of hen’s eggs, right on the sand, and leave the sun’s heat to hatch them.)

The eastern end of Long Island, the Peconic bay region, I knew quite well too—sail’d more than once around Shelter island, and down to Montauk—spent many an hour on Turtle hill by the old light-house, on the extreme point, looking out over the ceaseless roll of the Atlantic. I used to like to go down there and fraternize with the blue-fishers, or the annual squads of sea-bass takers. Sometimes, along Montauk peninsula, (it is some 15 miles long, and good grazing,) met the strange, unkempt, half-barbarous herdsmen, at that time living the life entirely aloof from society or civilization, in charge, on those rich pasturages, of vast droves of horses, kine or sheep, own’d by farmers of the eastern towns. Sometimes, too, the few remaining Indians, or half-breeds, at that period left on Montauk peninsula, but now I believe altogether extinct.

More in the middle of the island were the spreading Hempstead plains, then (1830–’40) quite prairie-like, open, uninhabited, rather sterile, cover’d with kill-calf and huckleberry bushes, yet plenty of fair pasture for the cattle, mostly milch-cows, who fed there by hundreds, even thousands, and at evening, (the plains too were own’d by the towns, and that was the use of them in common,) might be seen taking their way home, branching off regularly in the right places. I have often been out on the edges of these plains toward sundown, and can yet recall in fancy the interminable cow processions, and hear the music of the tin or copper bells clanking far or near, and breathe the cool of the sweet and slight aromatic evening air, and note the sunset.

Through the same region of the island, but further east, extended wide central tracts of pine and scrub-oak, (charcoal was largely made here,) monotonous and sterile. But many a good day or half-day did I have, wandering through those solitary cross-roads, inhaling the peculiar and wild aroma. Here, and all along the island and its shores, I spent intervals many years, all seasons, sometimes riding, sometimes boating, but generally afoot, (I was always then a good walker,) absorbing fields, shores, marine incidents, characters, the bay-men, farmers, pilots—always had a plentiful acquaintance with the latter, and with fishermen—

went every summer on sailing trips—always liked the bare sea-beach, south side, and had some of my happiest hours on it to this day.

As I write, the whole experience comes back to me after the lapse of forty and more years—the soothing rustle of the waves, and the saline smell—boyhood's times, the clam-digging barefoot, and with trowsers roll'd up—hauling down the creek—the perfume of the sedge meadows—the hay-boat, and the chowder and fishing excursions;—or, of later years, little voyages down and out New York bay, in the pilot boats. Those same later years, also, while living in Brooklyn, (1836-'50) I went regularly every week in the mild seasons down to Coney island, at that time a long, bare unfrequented shore, which I had all to myself, and where I loved, after bathing, to race up and down the hard sand, and declaim Homer or Shakspeare to the surf and sea-gulls by the hour. But I am getting ahead too rapidly, and must keep more in my traces.

#### MY FIRST READING.—LAFAYETTE.

From 1824 to '28 our family lived in Brooklyn in Front, Cranberry and Johnson streets. In the latter my father built a nice house for a home, and afterwards another in Tillary street. We occupied them, one after the other, but they were mortgaged, and we lost them. I yet remember Lafayette's visit.<sup>8</sup> Most of these years I went to the public schools. It must have been about 1829 or '30 that I went with my father and mother to hear Elias Hicks preach in a ball-room on Brooklyn heights. At about the same time employ'd as a boy in an office of lawyers', father and two sons, Clarke's, Fulton street, near Orange. I had a nice desk and window-nook to myself; Edward C. kindly help'd me at my handwriting and composition, and, (the signal event of my life up to that time,) subscribed for me to a big circulating library. For a time I now revel'd in romance-reading of all kinds; first, the "Arabian Nights" all the volumes, an amazing treat. Then, with sorties in very many other directions, took to Walter Scott's novels, one after another, and his poetry, (and continue to enjoy novels and poetry to this day.)

#### PRINTING OFFICE.—OLD BROOKLYN.

After about two years went to work in a weekly newspaper and printing office, to learn the trade. The paper was the "Long Island Patriot," owned by S. E. Clements, who was also postmaster. An old printer in the office, William Hartshorne, a revolutionary character, who had seen Washington, was a special friend of mine, and I had many a talk with him about long past times. The apprentices, including myself, boarded with his grand-daughter. I used occasionally to go out riding with the boss, who was very kind to us boys; Sundays he took us all to a great old rough, fortress-looking stone church, on Joralemon street, near where the Brooklyn city hall now is—(at that time broad fields and country roads everywhere around.) Afterward I work'd on the "Long Island Star," Alden Spooner's paper. My father all these years pursuing his trade as carpenter and builder, with varying fortune. There was a growing family of children—eight of us—my brother Jesse the oldest, myself the second, my dear sisters Mary and Hannah Louisa, my brothers Andrew, George, Thomas Jefferson, and the my youngest brother, Edward, born 1835, and always badly crippled, as I am myself of late years.

#### GROWTH—HEALTH—WORK.

I develop'd (1833–4–5) into a healthy, strong youth (grew too fast, though, was nearly as big as a man at 15 or 16.) Our family at this period moved back to the country, my dear mother very ill for a long time, but recover'd. All these years I was down Long Island more or less every summer, now east, now west, sometimes months at a stretch. At 16, 17, and so on, was fond of debating societies, and had an active membership with them, off and on, in Brooklyn and one or two country towns on the island. A most omnivorous novel-reader, these and later years, devour'd everything I could get. Fond of the theatre, also, in New York, whenever I could—sometimes witnessing fine performances.

1836–7, work'd as compositor in printing offices in New York city. Then, when little more than eighteen, and for a while afterwards, went to teaching country schools down in Queens and Suffolk counties, Long Island, and “boarded round.” (This latter I consider one of my best experiences and deepest lessons in human nature behind the scenes, and in the masses.) In '39, '40, I started and publish'd a weekly paper in my native town, Huntington. Then, returning to New York city and Brooklyn, work'd on as printer and writer, mostly prose, but an occasional shy at “poetry.”

#### MY PASSION FOR FERRIES.

Living in Brooklyn or New York city from this time forward, my life, then, and still more the following years, was curiously identified with Fulton ferry, already becoming the greatest of its sort in the world for general importance, volume, variety, rapidity, and picturesqueness. Almost daily, later, ('50 to '60,) I cross'd on the boats, often up in the pilot-houses where I could get a full sweep, absorbing shows, accompaniments, surroundings. What ocean currents, eddies, underneath—the great tides of humanity also, with ever-shifting movements. Indeed, I have always had a passion for ferries; to me they afford inimitable streaming, never-failing, living poems. The river and bay scenery, all about New York island any time of a fine day—the hurrying, splashing sea-tides—the changing panorama of steamers, all sizes, often a string of big ones outward bound to distant ports—the myriads of white-sail'd schooners, sloops, skiffs, and the marvellously beautiful yachts—the majestic sound boats as they rounded the Battery and came along towards 5, afternoon, eastward bound—the prospect off towards Staten island, or down the Narrows, or the other way up the Hudson—what refreshment of spirit such sights and experiences gave me years ago (and many a time since.) My old pilot friends, the Balsirs, Johnny Cole, Ira Smith, William White, and my young ferry friend, Tom Gere—how well I remember them all.

#### BROADWAY SIGHTS.

Besides Fulton ferry, off and on for years, I knew and frequented Broadway—that notable avenue of New York's crowded and mixed humanity, and of so many notables. Here I saw during those times, Andrew Jackson, Webster, Clay, Seward, Martin Van Buren, filibuster Walker, Kossuth, Fitz Greene Halleck, Bryant, the Prince of Wales, Charles Dickens, the first Japanese ambassadors, and lots of other celebrities of the time. Always something novel and inspiriting; yet mostly to me the hurrying and vast amplitude of those never-ending human currents. I remember seeing James Fenimore Cooper in a court-room in Chambers street back of the city hall, where he was carrying on a law case—(I think it was a charge of libel he had brought against some one.) I also remember seeing Edgar A. Poe, and having a short interview with him, (it must have been in 1845 or '6,) in his office, second story of a corner

building, (Duane or Pearl street.) He was editor and owner or part owner of "the Broadway Journal." The visit was about a piece of mine he had publish'd. Poe was very cordial, in a quiet way, appear'd well in person, dress, &c. I have a distinct and pleasing remembrance of his looks, voice, manner and matter; very kindly and human, but subdued, perhaps a little jaded. For another of my reminiscences, here on the west side, just below Houston street, I once saw (it must have been about 1832, of a sharp, bright January day) a bent, feeble but stout-built very old man, bearded, swathed in rich furs, with a great ermine cap on his head led and assisted, almost carried, down the steps of his high front stoop (a dozen friends and servants, emulous, carefully holding, guiding him) and then lifted and tuck'd in a gorgeous sleigh, envelop'd in other furs, for a ride. The sleigh was drawn by as fine a team of horses as I ever saw. (You needn't think all the best animals are brought up nowadays; never was such horseflesh as fifty years ago on Long Island, or south, or in New York city; folks look'd for spirit and mettle in a nag, not tame speed merely.) Well, I, a boy of perhaps thirteen or fourteen, stopp'd and gazed long at the spectacle of that fur-swathed old man, surrounded by friends and servants, and the careful seating of him in the sleigh. I remember the spirited champing horses, the driver with his whip, and a fellow-driver by his side, for extra prudence. The old man, the subject of so much attention, I can almost see now. It was John Jacob Astor.

The years 1846, '47, and there along, see me still in New York city, working as writer and printer, having my usual good health, and a good time generally.

#### OMNIBUS JAUNTS AND DRIVERS.

One phase of those days must by no means go unrecorded—namely, the Broadway omnibuses, with their drivers. The vehicles still (I write this paragraph in 1881) give a portion of the character of Broadway—the Fifth avenue, Madison avenue, and Twenty-third street lines yet running. But the flush days of the old Broadway stages, characteristic and copious, are over. The Yellow-birds, the Red-birds, the original Broadway, the Fourth avenue, the Knickerbocker, and a dozen others of twenty or thirty years ago, are all gone. And the men specially identified with them, and giving vitality and meaning to them—the drivers—of a strange, natural, quick-eyed and wondrous race—(not only Rabelais and Cervantes would have gloated upon them, but Homer and Shakspeare would)—how well I remember them, and must here give a word about them. How many hours, forenoons and afternoons—how many exhilarating night-times I have had—perhaps June or July, in cooler air—riding the whole length of Broadway, listening to some yarn, (and the most vivid yarns ever spun, and the rarest mimicry)—or perhaps I declaiming some stormy passage from Julius Cæsar or Richard III. (you could roar as loudly as you chose in that heavy, dense, uninterrupted street-bass.) Yes, I knew all the drivers then, Broadway Jack, Dressmaker, Balky Bill, George Storms, Old Elephant, his brother Young Elephant (who came afterward,) Tippy, Pop Rice, Big Frank, Yellow Joe, Pete Callahan, Patsy Dee, and dozens more; for there were hundreds. They had immense qualities, largely animal—eating, drinking, women—great personal pride, in the way—perhaps a few slouches here and there, but I should have trusted the general run of them, in their simple good-will and honor, under all circumstances. Not only for comradeship and sometimes affection—great studies I found them also. (I suppose the critics will laugh heartily, but the influence of those Broadway omnibus jaunts and drivers and declamation and escapades undoubtedly enter'd into the gestation of *Leaves of Grass*.)



- **[Death by Hollywood for free](#)**
- [read online Gaslighting, the Double Whammy, Interrogation and Other Methods of Covert Control in Psychotherapy and Analysis pdf, azw \(kindle\)](#)
- [read online Master of the Cauldron \(Lord of the Isles, Book 6\)](#)
- [read \*Christmas Cookie Jar: Over 200 Old-Fashioned Cookie Recipes and Ideas for Creative Gift-Giving pdf, azw \(kindle\)\*](#)
  
- <http://junkrobots.com/ebooks/Matty-Doolin.pdf>
- <http://transtrade.cz/?ebooks/The-Long-Fall--Leonid-McGill--Book-1-.pdf>
- <http://flog.co.id/library/Master-of-the-Cauldron--Lord-of-the-Isles--Book-6-.pdf>
- <http://fortune-touko.com/library/Mindfulness-for-Bipolar-Disorder--How-Mindfulness-and-Neuroscience-Can-Help-You-Manage-Your-Bipolar-Symptoms.pdf>