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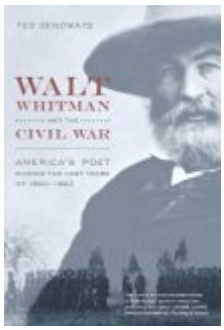
Ted Genoways. *Walt Whitman and the Civil War: America's Poet during the Lost Years of 1860-1862.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. Illustrations. vii + 210 pp. $24.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-520-25906-5.



Reviewed by Jason Stacy

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With countless years drawing themselves onward, and arrived at these years,

You and Me arrived--America arrived, and making this year,

This year! sending itself ahead countless years to come.

--Walt Whitman, "Chants Democratic," *Leaves of Grass* (1860)

In *Walt Whitman and the Civil War*, Ted Genoways has written an account of the poet during a period not so much "lost" as underappreciated. While this might not make for as compelling a title, Genoways nonetheless does Whitman scholarship great service by inviting us to reconsider this short but transitional period in the poet's life.

As Genoways notes, Roy Morris Jr.'s *Better Angel: Walt Whitman and the Civil War* (2000) "grants only a few pages to Whitman's activities in 1861 and 1862" and Mark Daniel Epstein's *Lincoln and Whitman: Parallel Lives in Civil War Washington* (2004) highlights only Whitman's Washington years in the title (p. 9). For Genoways, biographers like Morris and Epstein fall prey to a "common desire" to seek a "stable aesthetic" in Whitman's verse and, therefore, gloss over the messy transitional period between the publication of the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1860 and Whitman's appearance in Washington DC in 1862 upon receiving news of his brother George's battle injuries (p. 9). Genoways, however, wades into the murky years between Whitman-the-Bohemian and Good-Grey-Walt-of-the-Wards to reveal the poet in a state of flux.

The year 1860 began auspiciously for Whitman when the upstart publishing house of Thayer and Eldridge contacted the poet with the offer to publish a third edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Since publication of the first two editions, Whitman had consistently worked to expand the book and its audience; Thayer and Eldridge promised to "put your books in good form, and style attractive to the eye" and offered the poet the opportunity to take advantage of the printing, marketing, and distribution possibilities of a traditional publisher (p. 23). Calling Thayer and Eldridge traditional

might perhaps be a misnomer; the house's first publication, James Redpath's sympathetic biography of the radical abolitionist John Brown, sold well, but placed the publishers firmly within northeastern abolitionist print culture, the "red-hot fellows of those times," as Whitman later called them (p. 12). Whitman's publication of his third edition of *Leaves of Grass* represented the pinnacle of his bohemian years, roughly between 1857 and 1862, which revolved around the company of Pfaff's beer cellar and the local King of Bohemia, Henry Clapp, whose *Saturday Press* served as the organ of the saloon's collection of authors, artists, and self-avowed political radicals, most recently described in Mark Lause's *The Antebellum Crisis and America's First Bohemians* (2009). Clapp, himself, coined the term "bohemian" as we use it today to characterize this cadre of cultural rebels. There, Whitman found a sympathetic audience among his fellow Pfaffians and, within the pages of the *Saturday Press*, an active booster and outlet. According to Genoways, it was perhaps the controversy that Whitman's newly published poems stirred that convinced Thayer and Eldridge of Whitman's potential profitability.

The production of the 1860 edition brought Whitman to Boston and into the orbit of abolitionist politics and activism, a position he had actively avoided throughout his years as a journalist and a rhetorical tone he had only ambivalently embraced in his first three editions of *Leaves of Grass*. Genoways recounts the story of Whitman's part in the legal proceedings against Franklin B. Sanborn, abolitionist and member of the "secret six," who financially supported Brown's attack on the arsenal of Harper's Ferry. At a ruling to determine whether the writ of habeas corpus produced at Sanborn's arrest had been issued validly, Redpath and William Thayer planned to spirit Sanborn away from the court, by force if necessary, if Massachusetts's Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw ruled Sanborn's arrest legal. Redpath and Thayer were supported by, among others, one Whitman, who supposedly served as the lookout for the plot, which, luckily for all, never came to fruition (Judge Shaw threw out Sanborn's arrest on a technicality). For Genoways, "a year spent in the constant presence of Thayer, Eldridge, Redpath, [Richard] Hinton, and [William] O'Connor had convinced Whitman of the purgative power of war" and thereby gives proof of the poet's evolving perspective on the looming conflict (p. 84). Whereas poems like "Longings for Home" in the 1860 edition include what appear to be ham-handed appeals to Southern readers for the sake of national compromise, by 1861, Whitman, according to fellow-Pfaffian Jay C. Goldsmith, came nearly to blows with another bohemian, George Arnold, when Arnold toasted success to the secession cause. Thus, Whitman moved with the nation toward an embrace of war.

But Genoways does more than trace Whitman's transformation through biography. It is in this regard that his expertise in the history of American print culture and his experience as the editor of the award-winning *Virginia Quarterly Review* come to the fore. Social and economic forces, of which the poet proved acutely aware, forced Whitman to reformulate his bard persona from the prophet of bohemian religiosity who made jeremiads for the sake of national unity in 1860 to the patriotic war poet of Union and victory in 1861 and 1862. The effect of the war on the book trade helped this transformation; according to Genoways, the loss of the South as an outlet for northeastern publishers stalled antebellum bookselling. Establishing this conclusion through an analysis of declining book notices in the *North American Review* and the *Atlantic Monthly* coupled with Hinton Helper's claim that of three hundred American publishers in the United States, only thirty resided in the South, and by speculating that the six-month-to-year-long payment extensions that publishers offered to Southern booksellers in return for their business, Genoways demonstrates that the onset of war left many book publishers in financially dire straits. This, combined with a turn in public interest toward

day-to-day newspaper reports, forced already overextended publishers like Thayer and Eldridge out of business. Even the plates for Whitman's third edition of *Leaves of Grass* were lost in the bankruptcy. To maintain competitiveness in this new environment, publishers turned to patriotic titles in an attempt to appeal to the swelling ranks of the army. By July 1861, nearly half of the titles "received by the *Atlantic Monthly* were ... aimed at Union soldiers" (p. 105).

Whitman, long sensitive to the shifts in print culture since his years as a journalist in the 1840s, responded with "Beat! Beat! Drums!" Genoways insightfully analyzes the various appearances of this poem, from *Harper's Weekly* to the *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, from the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (where Whitman's former employers lampooned it) to the Oneida *Circular* (the organ of John Humphrey Noyes's utopian commune), and, ultimately, to San Francisco's *Daily Evening Bulletin*. Significantly for Genoways, Whitman first published "Beat! Beat! Drums!" in *Harper's Weekly*, which had a broader, more war-conscious readership than the more literary *Harper's Monthly* and, therefore, reached readers "waiting for news on the street corner, rather than the typical *Harper's Monthly* subscriber who enjoyed the literary content as a 'retreat' from the war" (p. 119). In mirroring the public's changing interest, Whitman adjusted his bardic voice to fit the explicitly martial and pro-Union sentiments of the moment; poems like the unpublished "Kentucky" and "1861," the latter of which Genoways speculates was rejected by the *Atlantic* because it mocked what Whitman called the "dainty rhymes" and "sentimental love verses" published in high literary pages throughout the war, further mark this change (p. 131). While the *Atlantic* published Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and Oliver Wendell Holmes's "Union and Liberty," Genoways describes these as "inspiring popular poems" with "regular rhythms" and "stock imagery" that Whitman countered with his call for "a strong man, erect, clothed in blue clothes, advancing, carrying a rifle on your shoulder," a verse that, ultimately, appeared in the poet's self-published *Drum Taps* in 1865 (p. 131). By late 1861, then, Whitman stood midpoint between the "purely literary audience at Pfaff's and the purely popular audience of the ... wide circulation newspapers and magazine" (pp. 140-141). While the poet moved between these two worlds throughout much of his career, Genoways uses these poems to expertly bridge what are often divided into antebellum and postbellum periods of the poet's life while at the same time situating these years within Whitman's lifelong ambivalent relationship with high literary culture and his beloved democratic mass.

Genoways's book is a welcome edition to Whitman scholarship. It contains many tantalizing discoveries for the Whitmanian: Ellen Eyre's true gender(s); quotes from newly discovered and/or unanalyzed letters; and anecdotes about the poet's comings and goings through New York, Boston, and Brooklyn. Historians will also appreciate Genoways's portrayal of a poet transformed by his times in the years before he reemerged to embody them.

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