



Eitner, Walter H. Walt Whitman's Western Jaunt [review]

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ISSN 0737-0679 (Print)
ISSN 2153-3695 (Online)

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Recommended Citation

Stovall, Floyd. "Eitner, Walter H. Walt Whitman's Western Jaunt [review]." *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 1 (1983), 48-48. <https://doi.org/10.13008/2153-3695.1010>

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power. Poetry, after all, is different from and much more than the ideas it may embody. With Mr. Bronk's help we may see Thoreau and Melville more clearly, but to enjoy and value Whitman, we shall be well advised to stick with *Leaves of Grass*.

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GERTRUDE M. WHITE

Walter H. Eitner. *Walt Whitman's Western Jaunt*. Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1981. xvi, 123 pp. \$18.00.

This is an attractively printed and bound volume of a little more than 100 pages, with numerous illustrations, detailed notes, and photographic reproductions. The frontispiece is from the portrait, 1880, now in the Rare Book Room of Yale University, and is certainly an excellent likeness of Whitman. The text is drawn chiefly from Whitman's *Prose Works* and from notebooks and other sources. The "jaunt" was a railway trip, much publicized, from Camden across seven states, made by Whitman and several friends in the Fall of 1879 under the sponsorship of John W. Forney, editor and publisher of the Philadelphia *Progress*, a weekly newspaper, and the occasion was a gathering of the group known as the *Old Settlers* in Lawrence, Kansas, where Forney was scheduled to make a speech. He invited a number of friends to accompany him, including Whitman; he himself was invited by the Old Settlers of Kansas, who had lived in the area 25 years and were celebrating their quarter-centennial.

After the celebration in Lawrence, the Whitman party went on to Denver, and from there made excursions into the Rocky Mountains, including a trip by rail to the summit of Kenosha Peak, from which the view was impressive. Whitman admired "the plentitude of material, entire absence of art, untrammelled play of primitive Nature." The poet had wanted to visit Leadville and left the impression that he had done so, but he wisely gave it up as too difficult. Instead, he explored the city of Denver and recorded his impressions, many of them later to be published in *Specimen Days*, not always it appears with complete accuracy, but with enthusiasm. Of the area he said he felt that "in all this grim yet joyous elemental abandon" he had found the law of his own poems. It pleased him and satisfied his vanity to speak of his poems in this fashion, but any careful reader will be convinced that this poetry was put together with considerable care.

He and his companions had stayed only one night in Denver, but Whitman pretended that he had remained several days there. On the train the next day, heading south with the vast mountain ridge in view, he thought they presented "the most spiritual show of objective Nature" he had ever beheld. Although he expected to stop in St. Louis on the way home for only a few days, he actually stayed more than six weeks. When he finally got back to Camden he found a check for \$100 from James T. Fields, which he said came in handy. He arrived in Philadelphia on 5 January 1880, and the next day the papers carried a story of his return, which probably was written by himself, for he was his own best press agent.

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