



On the Back Cover: A Whitman Manuscript Fragment

Ed Folsom

University of Iowa, ed-folsom@uiowa.edu

ISSN 0737-0679 (Print)

ISSN 2153-3695 (Online)

Copyright © 1997 Ed Folsom

Recommended Citation

Folsom, Ed. "On the Back Cover: A Whitman Manuscript Fragment." *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 14 (Spring 1997), 180-181. <https://doi.org/10.13008/2153-3695.1510>

This Note is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

would grow into Whitman's own commemorative address, given irregularly during the years to come on the anniversaries of Abraham Lincoln's death. Whitman's work on Speed's oration must have been effortless, growing out of his sense of duty to himself, to the Union, to Lincoln, and even to Speed. After all, as Ashton reminded friend Charles W. Eldridge, the Attorney General *did* provide Whitman with a stable employment that "enabled" him "to bring out with comfort" the fourth and fifth editions of *Leaves* (Barrus, 29).

Texas A&M University

M. LYNDA ELY

NOTES

1 James Speed's letter to Ashton can be found in the Feinberg/Whitman Collection at the Library of Congress, "To J. Hubley Ashton," December 29, 1866. See Barrus, *Whitman and Burroughs: Comrades* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1931), 25-41. Barrus begins with Harlan's "evasive" plea of forgetfulness (some twenty-nine years after the fact) about his reasons for firing Whitman, and then goes on to explain his reasons herself through the supportive letters of friends and associates, such as Charles W. Eldridge, Ashton, John Burroughs, Horace Traubel, and William Douglas O'Connor. According to Barrus, Harlan ultimately recapitulated: "'The removal of Whitman was the mistake of my life'" (34). Also see *The Solitary Singer* (New York: New York University Press, 1967), especially 344-350, 376-377, for a similarly supportive description of Whitman's dismissal/rehiring.

2 I am indebted to Jerome Loving, currently at work on a new critical biography of Whitman, for bringing this document to my attention.

3 *Oration of James Speed, Upon the Inauguration of the Bust of Abraham Lincoln at Louisville, Kentucky, February 12, 1867* (Louisville: Bradley & Gilbert, 1867), 7. All citations to Speed's speech refer to this edition.

4 All references to Whitman's poetry are taken from *Leaves of Grass*, edited by Sculley Bradley and Harold Blodgett (New York: New York University Press, 1965), 112. Further citations to Whitman's poetry refer to this edition, abbreviated as *LG*.

5 Floyd Stovall, ed., *Prose Works 1892* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), 1:60. Further citations to Whitman's prose refer to this edition, abbreviated as *PW*.

ON THE BACK COVER:

A WHITMAN MANUSCRIPT FRAGMENT

The Library of Congress, through gifts and purchases, continues to add to its vast collection of Whitman materials. One manuscript fragment recently added to the collection appears on the back cover.¹ Along the edge of the scrap of paper on which Whitman's notes are written appears the inscription "Walt Whitman MSS from J. H. Johnston 1911." Johnston was a New York jeweler who befriended Whitman in the late 1870s and often invited Whitman to stay at his home. The manuscript is undated and reads as follows:

As to nationality [*cancelled: &*] in our literature [*cancelled: there are*] a & a demand that it should be autochthonous. There are sentences here and there through his writings

but they are surface sentences merely. [*Cancelled: Any*] There is no deep currents flowing from [*cancelled: powerful powerful*] the domination a powerful impulse or convictions of itself, nor any sign of such current. The Democratic spirit, which is the

It is unclear what writer Whitman is referring to here. The sentiments expressed in this fragment frequently appear in Whitman's essays on emerging democratic literature, as when he calls for "a sane, sweet, autochthonous national poetry" in his essay "Poetry To-Day in America" (*PW* 2:484).

The University of Iowa

ED FOLSOM

NOTES

1 I am grateful to Alice Birney, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, for bringing the acquisition to my attention.