

A Literary History of America

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sion. In former times Griswold and Duyckinck made similar collections of literature in American. As we have seen, both alike properly included many names for which Stedman and Hutchinson have found no room. It is hard to resist the conclusion that whoever shall make a new library of American literature, thirty or forty years hence, will by the same token find no place for many of our contemporaries momentarily preserved by our latest anthologists. As you turn their pages, you can hardly avoid feeling that, however valuable these may be as history, they contain little which merits permanence.

Depressing as this may at first seem to patriotic spirit, it has another aspect. As we look back on the literary records of New England, we can perceive in its local history a trait like one which has marked those more fortunate regions of the old world whose expression has proved lasting. Artistic expression is apt to be the final fruit of a society about to wither. For generations, or perhaps for centuries, traditions grow until they reach a form which locally distinguishes the spot which has developed them from any other in the world. Then, at moments of change, there sometimes arises, in a race about to pass from the living, a mysterious impulse to make plastic or written records of what the past has meant. These are what render even Greece and Italy and Elizabethan England more than mere names. So one gradually grows to feel that only the passing of old New England made its literature possible. The great material prosperity of New York, meanwhile, has attracted thither during the past forty years countless numbers of energetic people from all over the world, — foreigners, New Englanders, Westerners, Southerners, and whomever else. In this immigrant invasion the old New York of Irving and Cooper and the rest has been swallowed up. There is now hardly a city in the world where you are so little apt to meet people whose families have lived there for three successive generations. Our new metropolis, in fact, is

not only far from such a stage of decline as should mark the beginning of its passage from life to history, but it has not even formed the tangible traditions which may by and by define its spiritual character.

What its features may finally be, then, we may only guess. On the whole, one inclines to guess hopefully. Beneath its bewildering material activity there is a greater vitality, a greater alertness, and in some aspects a greater wholesomeness, of intelligence than one is apt to find elsewhere. It is not that the artists and the men of letters who live there have done work which even on our American scale may be called great. It is not that these men, or men who shall soon follow them, may be expected to make lasting monuments. It is rather that about them surges, with all its fluctuating good and evil, the irresistible tide of world-existence. The great wealth of New York and its colossal material power, of course, involve a social complexity, and at least a superficial corruption, greater than America has hitherto known; and the men who live amid this bustling turmoil are habitually in contact with base things. Yet hundreds of them, sound at heart, think and speak with a buoyant courage which, even to a New Englander, seems almost youthfully to preserve that fresh simplicity of heart so characteristic of our ancestrally inexperienced America. You may shake your head at them, or smile, as much as you will; they impart to you, despite yourself, a mood of inexplicably brighter hopefulness than their words, or the facts which those words set forth, seem to justify.

So, very generally, we may say that our Middle States, as they used to be called, are now dominated by New York. This town, whose domination for the moment is not only local but almost national, owes its predominance to that outburst of material force which throughout the victorious North followed the period of the Civil War. What may come of it no one can tell. Of the past and the present there is little to remark beyond what we have remarked already. There is,

however, one exception. The Middle States, and to a great degree the city of New York itself, have produced just one eccentric literary figure, who has emerged into an isolation which is sometimes believed eminent. This is Walt Whitman.

WALT WHITMAN

WALT WHITMAN was older than one is apt to remember. He was born on Long Island in 1819, and he died in 1892. His life, then, was almost exactly contemporary with Lowell's. No two lives could have been much more different in condition. Lowell, the son of a minister, closely related to the best people of New England, lived all his life amid the gentlest academic and social influences in America. Whitman was the son of a carpenter and builder on the outskirts of Brooklyn; the only New England man of letters equally humble in origin was Whittier.

The contrast between Whitman and Whittier, however, is almost as marked as that between Whitman and Lowell. Whittier, the child of Quaker farmers in the Yankee country, grew up and lived almost all his life amid guileless influences. Whitman, born of the artisan class in a region close to the most considerable and corrupt centre of population on his native continent, had a rather vagrant youth and manhood. At times he was a printer, at times a school-master, at times editor of stray country newspapers, and by and by he took up his father's trade of carpenter and builder, erecting a number of small houses in his unlovely native region. Meanwhile he had rambled about the country and into Canada, much like those half-criminal wanderers whom we now call tramps; but in general until past thirty years old, he was apt to be within scent of the East River. The New York of which his erratic habits thus made the lower aspects so familiar to him was passing, in the last days of the Knickerbocker School, into

its metropolitan existence. The first edition of Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" appeared in 1855, the year which produced the "Knickerbocker Gallery."

During the Civil War he served devotedly as an army nurse. After the war, until 1873, he held some small government clerkships at Washington. In 1873 a paralytic stroke brought his active life to an end; for his last twenty years he lived an invalid at a little house in Camden, New Jersey.

Until 1855, when the first edition of "Leaves of Grass" appeared in a thin folio, some of which he set up with his own hands, Whitman had not declared himself as a man of letters. From that time to the end he was constantly publishing his eccentric poetry, which from time to time he collected in increasing bulk under the old title. He published, too, some stray volumes of prose,—*"Democratic Vistas,"* and the like. Prose and poetry alike seem permeated with a conviction that he had a mission to express and to extend the spirit of democracy, which he believed characteristic of his country. To himself, then, he seemed the inspired prophet of an America which he asserted to be above all things else the land of the people; few men have ever cherished a purpose more literally popular. His fate has been ironic. Though even in his lifetime he became conspicuous, it is doubtful whether any man of letters in his country ever appealed less to the masses. He was a prophet of democracy, if you like; but the public to which his prophecy made its way was at once limited, fastidiously overcultivated, and apt to be of foreign birth.

Beyond question Whitman had remarkable individuality and power. Equally beyond question he was among the most eccentric individuals who ever put pen to paper. The natural result of this has been that his admirers have admired him intensely; while whoever has found his work repellent has found it irritating. Particularly abroad, however, he has attracted much critical attention; and many critics have been disposed to maintain that his amorphous prophecies of democracy are

deeply characteristic of America. The United States, they point out, are professedly the most democratic country in the world; Whitman is professedly the most democratic of American writers; consequently he must be the most typical.

The abstract ideal of democracy has never been better summed up than in the well-known watchwords of republican France: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. Disguised and distorted though these words may have been by a century of French Revolutionary excess, there is no denying that they stand for ideals essentially noble and inspiring. What is more, these ideals, which everywhere underlie the revolutionary spirit, have consciously influenced the nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic. In the progress of American democracy, however, one of these ideals has been more strenuously kept in mind than the other two. American democracy did not spring from abstract philosophising; it had its origin in the old conceptions of liberty and rights as maintained by the Common Law of England. Though no commonplace, then, has been more familiar to American ears than the glittering generality which maintains all men to be born equal, the practical enthusiasm of American democracy has been chiefly excited by the ideal of liberty. The theoretical democracy of Europe, on the other hand, has tended rather to emphasise the ideal of fraternity, which seems incidentally to include a sound thrashing for any brother who fails to feel fraternal; and still more this European democracy has tended increasingly to emphasise the dogma of human equality. Though this doubtless beautiful ideal eloquently appeals to many generous natures, it seems hardly to accord with the teachings either of natural law or of any recorded experience. Nothing, it maintains, ought really to be held intrinsically better than anything else. In plain words, the ideal of equality, carried to its extreme, asserts all superiority, all excellence, to be a phase of evil.

Now, Walt Whitman's gospel of democracy certainly in-

cluded liberty and laid strong emphasis on fraternity. He liked to hail his fellow-citizens by the wild, queer name of "camerados," which, for some obscure reason of his own, he preferred to "comrades." The ideal which most appealed to him, however, was that of equality. Though he would hardly have assented to such orthodox terms, his creed seems to have been that, as God made everything, one thing is just as good as another. There are aspects in which such a proposition seems analogous to one which should maintain a bronze cent to be every whit as good as a gold eagle because both are issued by the same government from the same mint. At best, however, analogies are misleading arguments; and people who share Whitman's ideal are apt to disregard as superstitious any argument, however impressive, which should threaten to modify their faith in equality. It is a superstition, they would maintain, that some ways of doing things are decent and some not; one way is really just as good as another. It is a superstition that kings, nobles, and gentlemen are in any aspect lovelier than the mob. It is a superstition that men of learning are intellectually better than the untutored. It is a superstition which would hold a man who can make a chair unable consequently to make a constitution. It is a superstition that virtuous women are inherently better than street-walkers. It is a superstition that law is better than anarchy. There are things, to be sure, which are not superstitions. Evil and baseness and ugliness are real facts, to be supremely denounced and hated; and incidentally, we must admit, few arraignment of the vulgarity and materialism which have developed in the United States are more pitiless than those which appear in Whitman's "Democratic Vistas." The cause of these hurtful things, however, he is satisfied to find in the traces of our ancestral and superstitious devotion to outworn ideals of excellence. We can all find salvation in the new, life-saving ideal of equality. Let America accept this ideal, and these faults will vanish into that limbo of the past to which he would

gladly consign all superstitions. Among these, he logically, though reluctantly, includes a great part of the poetry of Shakspeare; for Shakspeare, undoubtedly a poet, was a poet of inequality, who represented the people as a mob. For all his genius, then, Shakspeare was an apostle of the devil, another lying prophet of the superstition of excellence.

Even though excellence be a wicked and tyrannical ideal, however, democratic prophecy does not forbid the whole world equally to improve. Equalisation need not mean the reducing of all that is admirable to the level of what is base. It may just as well mean the raising of much that is base towards the height of what is admirable. The superstition which has worked most sordid evil is that which denies human equality. Retract the denial, then; let human beings be equal, and the force which has most distorted mankind shall cease working. Then all alike may finally rise, side by side, into an equality superior to what has gone before. The prophets of equality are so stirred by dreams of the future that they half forget the horrors of present or past; and among prophets of equality Walt Whitman has the paradoxical merit of eminence.

Now, this dogma of equality clearly involves a trait which has not yet been generally characteristic of American thought or letters, — a complete confusion of values. In the early days of Renaissance in New England, to be sure, Emerson and the rest, dazzled by the splendours of that new world of art and literature which was at last thrown open, made small distinction between those aspects of it which are excellent and those which are only stimulating. At the same time they adhered as firmly as the Puritans themselves to the ideal of excellence; and among the things with which they were really familiar they pretty shrewdly distinguished those which were most valuable, either on earth or in heaven. With Walt Whitman, on the other hand, everything is confused.

Take, for example, a passage from his "Song of Myself," which contains some of his best-known phrases: —

"A child said *What is the grass?* fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more
than he.

"I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green
stuff woven.

"Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we may see
and remark, and say *Whose?*

"Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of vegetation.

"Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,
Growing among black folds as among white,
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same, I
receive them the same.

"And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.

"Tenderly will I use you, curling grass,
It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men,
It may be if I had known them I would have loved them,
It may be you are from old people, or from offspring taken soon out
of their mothers' laps,
And here you are the mothers' laps.

"The grass is very dark to be from the white heads of old mothers,
Darker than the colourless beards of old men,
Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of mouths.

"O I perceive after all so many uttering tongues,
And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for
nothing.

"I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and
women,
And the hints about the old men and mothers, and the offspring
taken soon out of their laps.

"What do you think has become of the young and old men?
And what do you think has become of the women and children?

"They are alive and well somewhere,
The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,
And if ever there was it had forward life, and does not wait at the
end to arrest it,
And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.

"All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier."

Here is perhaps his best-known phrase, "the beautiful uncut hair of graves." Here are other good phrases, like "the faint red roofs of mouths." Here, too, is undoubtedly tender feeling. Here, into the bargain, is such rubbish as "I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord," — who incidentally uses perfumery, — and such jargon as "Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff." In an inextricable hodge-podge you find at once beautiful phrases and silly gabble, tender imagination and insolent commonplace, — pretty much everything, in short, but humour. In America this literary anarchy, this complete confusion of values, is especially eccentric; for America has generally displayed instinctive common-sense, and common-sense implies some notion of what things are worth. One begins to see why Whitman has been so much more eagerly welcomed abroad than at home. His conception of equality, utterly ignoring values, is not that of American democracy, but rather that of European. His democracy, in short, is the least native which has ever found voice in his country. The saving grace of American democracy has been a tacit recognition that excellence is admirable.

In temper, then, Walt Whitman seems less American than any other of our conspicuous writers. It does not follow that in some aspects he is not very American indeed. Almost as certainly as Hawthorne, though very differently, he had the true artistic temperament; life moved him to moods which could find relief only in expression. Such a temperament would have expressed itself anywhere; and Whitman's would probably have found the most congenial material for expression in those European regions which have been most disturbed by French Revolutionary excess. He chanced, however, to be born, and to attain the maturity which he awaited before he began to publish, in unmingled American surroundings. As obviously as Hawthorne's experience was confined to New England,

Come on, ships from the lower bay! pass up or down, white-sail'd
schooners, sloops, lighters!
Flaunt away, flags of all nations! be duly lowered at sunset!
Burn high your fires, foundry chimneys! cast black shadows at
nightfall! cast red and yellow light over the tops of the houses!
Appearances, now or henceforth, indicate what you are;
You necessary film, continue to envelope the soul,
About my body for me, and your body for you, be hung our divinest
aromas,
Thrive cities, — bring your freight, bring your shows, ample and
sufficient rivers,
Expand, being than which none else is perhaps more spiritual,
Keep your places, objects than which none else is more lasting.
"You have waited, you always wait, you dumb, beautiful ministers,
We receive you with free sense at last, and are insatiate hence-
forward,
Not you any more shall be able to foil us, or withhold yourselves
from us,
We use you and do not cast you aside — we plant you permanently
within us,
We fathom you not — we love you — there is perfection in you also,
You furnish your parts toward eternity,
Great or small you furnish your parts toward the soul."

The eight preceding stanzas are very like this, — confused, inarticulate, and surging in a mad kind of rhythm which sounds as if hexameters were trying to bubble through sewage. For all these faults, Whitman has here accomplished a wonder. Despite his eccentric insolence both of phrase and of temper you feel that in a region where another eye would have seen only unspeakable vileness, he has found impulses which prove it, like every other region on earth, a fragment of the divine eternities. The glories and beauties of the universe are really perceptible everywhere; and into what seemed utterly sordid Whitman has breathed ennobling imaginative fervour. Cultured and academic folk are disposed to shrink from what they call base, to ignore it, to sneer at it; looking closer, Whitman tells us that even amid base things you cannot wander so far as to lose sight of the heavens, with all their fountains of glorious emotion.

Whitman's was confined to that of the lower classes in those regions which were developing into modern New York.

Whoever remembers the growth of this region will remember what sometimes seemed the ugliest thing to the eye, the most overwhelmingly oppressive to any instinct of taste, the most sordidly hopeless atmosphere possible to human experience. Now, Whitman, we remember, came to his maturity within scent of the East River; and certainly the East River, separating New York and Brooklyn, was at that time the spot of spots where life seemed most material, most grindingly distant from ideal beauty. Yet the contemplation of this very East River evoked from Whitman the poem which sometimes seems his most nearly beautiful. Here is the last stanza of this "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry": —

"Flow on, river! flow with the flood-tide, and ebb with the ebb-tide!
Frolic on, crested and scallop-edg'd waves!
Gorgeous clouds of the sunset! drench with your splendour me, or
the men and women generations after me!
Cross from shore to shore, countless crowds of passengers!
Stand up, tall masts of Mannahatta! stand up, beautiful hills of
Brooklyn!
Throb, baffled and curious brain! throw out questions and answers!
Suspend here and everywhere, eternal float of solution!
Gaze, loving and thirsting eyes, in the house or street or public
assembly!
Sound out, voices of young men! loudly and musically call me by
my highest name!
Live, old life! play the part that looks back on the actor or actress!
Play the old rôle, the rôle that is great or small according as one
makes it!
Consider, you who peruse me, whether I may not in unknown ways
be looking upon you;
Be firm, rail over the river, to support those who lean idly, yet haste
with the hasting current;
Fly on, sea-birds! fly sideways, or wheel in large circles high in the
air;
Receive the summer sky, you water, and faithfully hold it till all the
downcast eyes have time to take it from you!
Diverge, fine spokes of light, from the shape of my head, or anyone's
head, in the sunlit water!

But what is this emotion? Just here Whitman seems to stop. With singular vividness, and with the unstinted sympathy of his fervent faith in equality, he tells what he sees. Though often his jargon is amorphously meaningless, his words are now and again so apt as to approach that inevitable union of thought and phrase which makes lasting poetry. When he has reported what he sees, however, utterly confusing its values, he has nothing more to say about it. At most he leaves you with a sense of new realities concerning which you must do your thinking for yourself.

Sometimes, of course, he was more articulate. The Civil War stirred him to his depths; and he drew of its byways such little pictures as "Ethiopia Saluting the Colours":—

"Who are you dusky woman, so ancient, hardly human,
With your wooly-white and turban'd head, and bare bony feet?
Why rising by the roadside here, do you the colours greet?"

"('T is while our army lines Carolina's sands and pines,
Forth from thy hovel door thou Ethiopia com'st to me,
As under doughty Sherman I march toward the sea.)

*"Me master years a hundred since from my parents sunder'd,
A little child, they caught me as the savage beast is caught,
Then hither me across the sea the cruel slaver brought.*

"No further does she say, but lingering all the day,
Her high-borne turban'd head she wags, and rolls her darkling eye
And courtesies to the regiments, the guidons moving by.

"What is it fateful woman, so blear, hardly human?
Why wag your head with turban bound, yellow, red and green?
Are the things so strange and marvellous you see or have seen?"

In Lincoln he found his ideal hero; and his verse on Lincoln's death is probably his best:—

"O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;

But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

"O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-
crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
Here Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head!
It is some dream that on the deck,
You've fallen cold and dead.

"My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,
The ship is anchored safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;
Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
But I with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead."

Even in bits like this, however, which come so much nearer form than is usual with Whitman, one feels his perverse rudeness of style. Such eccentricity of manner is bound to affect different tempers in different ways. One kind of reader, naturally eager for individuality and fresh glimpses of truth, is disposed to identify oddity and originality. Another kind of reader distrusts literary eccentricity as instinctively as polite people distrust bad manners. In both of these instinctive reactions from such a method of address as Whitman's there is an element of truth. Beyond doubt, eccentric masters of the fine arts give rise to perverse eccentricity in imitators. Browning and Carlyle, to go no further, have bred in brains feebler than their own much nonsensical spawn; and so has Walt Whitman. But some artists of great power prove naturally unable to express themselves properly. Their trouble is like a muscular distortion which should compel lameness, or a vocal malformation which should make utter-

ance hoarse or shrill. So there have been great men, and there will be more, whom fate compels either to express themselves uncouthly or else to stay dumb. Such a man, great or not, Whitman seems to have been. Such men, greater than he, were Carlyle and Browning. The critical temper which would hold them perverse, instead of unfortunate, is mistaken.

On the other hand, that different critical temper which would welcome their perversities as newly revealed evidences of genius is quite as mistaken in another way. If any general law may be inferred from the history of fine arts, it is that any persistent school of expression must be articulate. In any art, of course, vital expression must be spontaneous; academic training, dogmatic routine, has never originated much that is worth while. The nobler works of art, however, which have maintained themselves as permanent parts of the great structure of human expression, have form. Their lasting vitality comes partly from the fact that their makers have spontaneously obeyed natural laws which may be generalised into academic principles. The development of human expression seems like the growth of a tree. The same vital force which sends the trunk heavenward, puts forth branches, and from these in turn sends forth twigs and leaves; but the further they stray from the root, the weaker they prove. The trunk lives, and the greater branches; year by year, the lesser twigs and leaves wither. Now, eccentricity of manner, however unavoidable, is apt to indicate that art has strayed dangerously far from its vital origin. Oddity is no part of solid artistic development; however beautiful or impressive, it is rather an excrescent outgrowth, bound to prove abortive, and at the same time to sap life from a parent stock which without it might grow more loftily and strongly.

Walt Whitman's style is of this excrescent, abortive kind. Like Carlyle's or Browning's, it is something which nobody else can imitate with impunity; and so, like theirs, it is a style which in the history of literature suggests a familiar phase of

decline. That it was inevitable you will feel if you compare "Ethiopia Saluting the Colours" or "My Captain" with the unchecked perversities of Whitman's verse in general. The "Song of Myself," or "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," which we may take as generally representative of his work, are so recklessly misshapen that you cannot tell whether their author was able to write with amenity. When you find him, however, as in those lesser pieces, attempting technical form, you at once feel that his eccentricity is a misfortune, for which he is no more to blame than a lame man for limping, or a deaf and dumb for expressing emotion by inarticulate cries. The alternative would have been silence; and Whitman was enough of a man to make one glad that he never dreamed of it.

In this decadent eccentricity of Whitman's style there is again something foreign to the spirit of this country. American men of letters have generally had deep artistic conscience. This trait has resulted, for one thing, in making the short story, an essentially organic form of composition, as characteristic of American literature as the straggling, inorganic three-volume novel is of English. Now and again, to be sure, American men of letters have chosen to express themselves in quite another manner. They have tried to reproduce the native dialects of the American people. This impulse has resulted in at least one masterpiece, that amazing *Odyssey of the Mississippi* to which Mark Twain gave the fantastic name of "Huckleberry Finn." As we remarked of the "Biglow Papers," however, this "dialect" literature of America often proves on analysis more elaborately studied than orthodox work by the same writers. Neither the "Biglow Papers" nor "Huckleberry Finn" could have been produced without an artistic conscience as strenuous as Irving's, or Poe's, or Hawthorne's. The vagaries of Walt Whitman, on the other hand, are as far from literary conscience as the animals which he somewhere celebrates are from unhappiness or respectability. Whitman's style, then, is as little characteristic of

America as his temper is of traditional American democracy. One can see why the decadent taste of modern Europe has welcomed him so much more ardently than he has ever been welcomed at home; in temper and in style he was an exotic member of that sterile brotherhood which eagerly greeted him abroad. In America his oddities were more eccentric than they would have been anywhere else.

On the other hand, there is an aspect in which he seems not only native but even promising. During the years when his observation was keenest, and his temper most alert, he lived in the environment from which our future America seems most likely to spring. He was born and grew up, he worked and lived, where on either side of the East River the old American towns of New York and Brooklyn were developing into the metropolis which is still too young to possess ripe traditions. In full maturity he devoted himself to army nursing,—the least picturesque or glorious, and the most humanely heroic, service which he could have rendered his country during its agony of civil war. In that Civil War the elder America perished; the new America which then arose is not yet mature enough for artistic record. Whitman's earthly experience, then, came throughout in chaotic times, when our past had faded and our future had not yet sprung into being. Bewildering confusion, fused by the accident of his lifetime into the seeming unity of a momentary whole, was the only aspect of human existence which could be afforded him by the native country which he so truly loved. For want of other surroundings he was content to seek the meaning of life amid New York slums and dingy suburban country, in the crossing of Brooklyn Ferry, or in the hospitals which strove to alleviate the drums and tramplings of civil war. His lifelong eagerness to find in life the stuff of which poetry is made has brought him, after all, the reward he would most have cared for. In one aspect he is thoroughly American. The spirit of his work is that of world-old anarchy; its form has all the perverse

oddity of world-old abortive decadence ; but the substance of which his poems are made — their imagery as distinguished from their form or their spirit — comes wholly from our native country.

In this aspect, then, though probably in no other, he may, after all, throw light on the future of literature in America. As has been said before, "He is uncouth, inarticulate, whatever you please that is least orthodox ; yet, after all, he can make you feel for the moment how even the ferry-boats plying from New York to Brooklyn are fragments of God's eternities. Those of us who love the past are far from sharing his confidence in the future. Surely, however, that is no reason for denying the miracle that he has wrought by idealising the East River. The man who has done this is the only one who points out the stuff of which perhaps the new American literature of the future may in time be made."