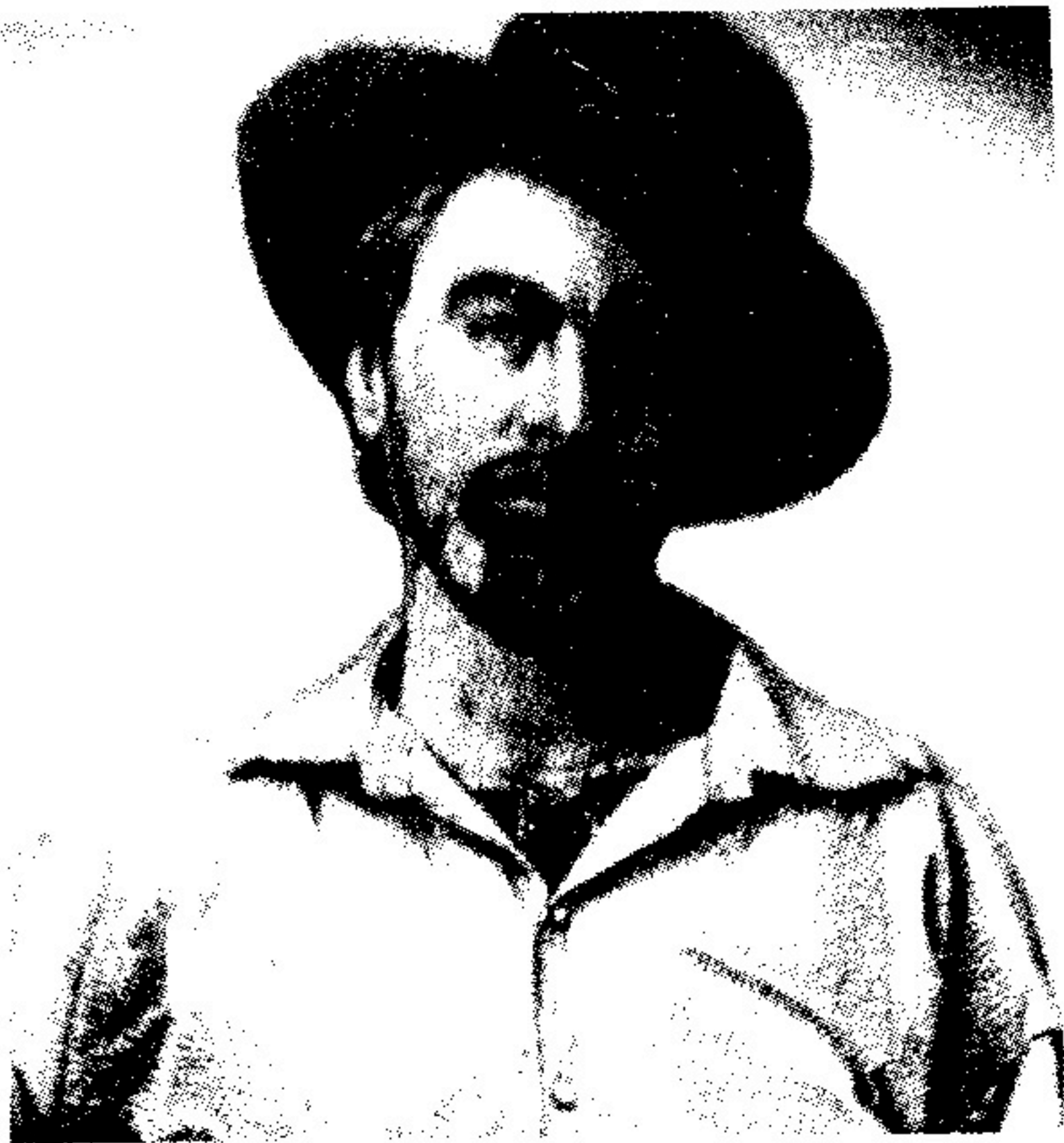


MICKLE STREET REVIEW #6: "WHITMAN AND WORK"

In 1846, at the age of 27, Walt Whitman had his picture taken by a Brooklyn photographer. He presented himself in the portrait as a formally attired professional man, with black coat, vest, cravat, and starched collar, his long hair well combed, his beard well trimmed and his moustache completely shaven, one hand behind his head conveying something debonair in his manner; his expression was a little quizzical, perhaps also a little blasé. It was, in sum, the picture of a conventional, sophisticated, successful young journalist with an interest in, but not radical commitment to, the moderate politics of the Democratic Party.



The next known, and much more famous picture we have of Whitman is the engraving made from a photograph which appeared at the front of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*. In this portrait, his hat sits a little jauntily upon his head; his loose and flowing shirt, worn without a coat, is open at the neck; his trousers are rough and unpressed; his beard is full, including a moustache, he slouches in-

formally, resting his hand on his hip, and his eyes stare back frankly, almost defiantly at the camera.

What changes of identity had this young writer undergone in the transformation from journalist to poet? One clue is available in the similarity between the 1855 engraving of Whitman and the photographs of contemporary workers which make up the cover design for this issue of the *Mickle Street Review*. The two bakers, in particular, whose picture was taken in New Orleans at approximately the time Whitman was visiting that city in 1848, are almost identical to Whitman both in dress and manner. In becoming one of them, Whitman deliberately identified himself with, as he said in the Preface of the 1855 edition, "the poorest free mechanic or farmer with his hat unmoved from his head and firm eyes and a candid and generous heart."

This mixture of pride, eroticism, and resistance, so well described in Justin Kaplan's *Walt Whitman: A Life*, was more than an intellectual pose; it was the one fixed principle of his career, his main hope for the experiment in democracy that was the United States. In 1876, he described the Revolution of 1776 as "simply a great strike," the success of which "remains to be settled." In the depression years of the 1870's, which also saw the formation of the first national labor unions, Whitman witnessed the "unhealthy failure" of "our republican experiment" in the "vast crops of poor, desperate, dissatisfied, nomadic, miserably-waged populations, such as we see looming upon us of late years." But though the dream of a Jeffersonian democracy of free laborers had dimmed with the rise of industrial capitalism, Whitman believed to the end in the saving power of work and the dignity of the worker.

This issue of *The Mickle Street Review* presents a number of literary works in which the subject of work is examined. Whitman's own relation to the emerging labor movement is discussed in an essay by economist George Blyn; several poets describe the process of labor in contemporary society as Whitman might have seen it; and many more document the fact that the success of the "general strike" of labor for dignity and respect "remains to be seen." Lorelei Cederstrom contributes an essay that shows how the Imagist poets made use of Whitman's themes and images in their descriptions of workaday life even as they denied Whit-

man's influence on them. And we are proud to introduce an enhanced book review section, edited Eric Nelson (poetry) and Donald Kummings (scholarly books), which will henceforth be a regular feature of the magazine.

The editors of issue #6 take special pride in announcing the award of the Doris Kellogg Neale prize of \$100 to Douglas Morea of Newark, Delaware, for his poem, "The Song of the Sweeper." Mr. Morea has successfully combined the free verse of Walt Whitman with the introspective probing of T.S. Eliot to produce a meditation on work that is at once exhilarating and disturbing. Mr. Morea's poem, like the work of all of our contributors, testifies to the continuing presence of Walt Whitman in American letters.

The theme of *Mickle Street Review* #7 (1985) will be "Whitman and the Earth." The issue will celebrate the invigorating and regenerative power of nature, the lives of other creatures, and the cleansing or "recycling" activity of the earth. Essays relating Whitman to ecological thought, to Native American writers, and to Thoreau or other Transcendentalists would also be of interest. Send poetry, essays, and articles to Dr. Jean E. Pearson, Moravian College, Bethlehem, PA 08018; reviews of scholarly books to Dr. Donald Kummings, University of Wisconsin-Parkside, Box 2000, Kenosha, WI 53141; reviews of poetry books to Eric Nelson, 1411 N. Highland, Arlington, VA 22201.