

David Zeiger

WALT WHITMAN WALKS MANHATTAN, 1842

The new editor at the New York Aurora,
twenty-three and six-foot slim in black frock coat,
hat and boots, a boutonniere and trimmed beard,
“one of a living crowd” out for a lunchtime stroll
pauses at St. Paul’s Chapel to lean on his cane
and scan newspaper row across Broadway,
prodigal eye alive to what has happened,
to what will happen.

Crossing over to Park Row
to avoid the foppery of swells,
he passes the old Park Theatre
recalling “the singers, the tragedians, the comedians”
he loved as teen-age apprentice.
At Nassau St. “discordant notes of the newsboys”
hawk the Tribune, the Post, the New World
as Walt turns into #162 to work the night,
soon to be sacked because he roars,
won’t tone down his leaders.
Having come to measure himself against the Establishment,
he begins his freedom here,
at the center of the world.