



## The Culinary Walt Whitman

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## NOTES

### THE CULINARY WALT WHITMAN

“I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones.”  
—“Song of Myself”

I collect prints, prints related to eating and drinking, to all kinds of foods—including members of the vegetable kingdom, and the edible parts of beast and fowl, domestic and wild. I now have at least 10,000 prints, most of them purchased over the past thirty-five years in shops from Coral Gables to Portland, from Boston to Seal Beach. It was in Boston some twenty-five years ago when I was lecturing in a culinary program at Boston University that Walt Whitman first entered my collection. One day, walking in the inner city, I discovered Holman’s bookstore, a small, elegant shop. It turned out that the owner of the shop had a nephew who happened to live in the apartment above the restaurant that I own in Chicago. From that time on, whenever I went to Boston, Mr. Holman had something for my collection. Once he showed me a fine piece from an album of etchings printed for the U.S. government a few years after the Civil War. It was a sketch by Edwin Forbes, the American artist who accompanied the Army of the Potomac and made war drawings for *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*. Entitled “Fall in for soup,” the drawing showed a line of men in uniform in front of two kettles waiting for their meal (see Figure 1). I was thrilled to add this military dining scene to my collection. A decade or so later I received a phone call from a man in New York who said he had learned from Mr. Holman that I had purchased the drawing of the soldiers lined up for soup; he went

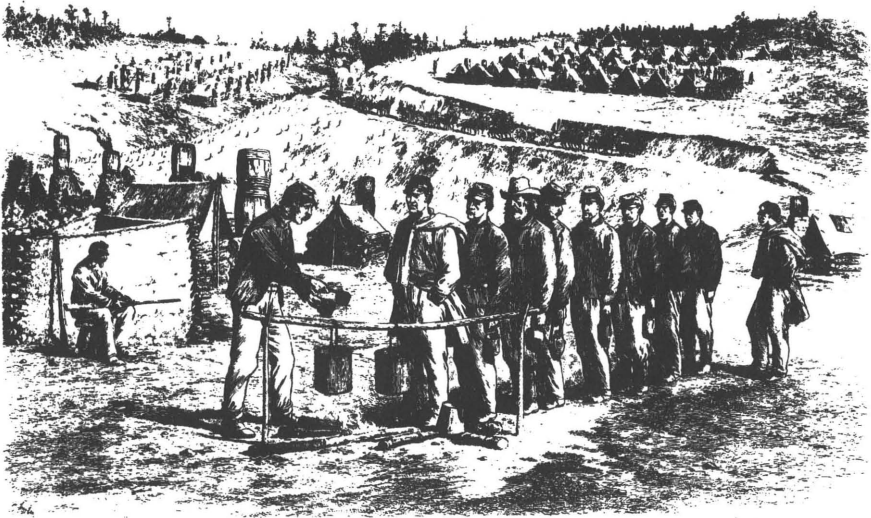


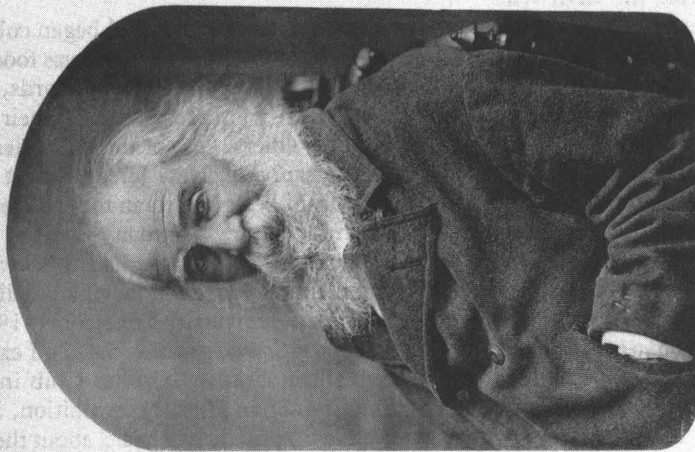
Figure 1: Edwin Forbes, “Fall in for soup.”

on to say he wanted very much to buy it because he was a collector of materials relating to Walt Whitman. The third man in line, he told me, was Walt Whitman. I told him I would consider an exchange if he could provide me with another good eating scene from the Civil War.

Time went by. I expanded my interests from culinary prints and began collecting manuscripts and other documents by famous people if the material was food-related. My collection grew through the years as I gathered letters, postcards, and printed items—all having some connection with food—from presidents and their first ladies, cabinet members, statesmen, authors and soldiers. One of the many dealers who supplied me was Joseph Rubinfine, of Pleasantville, New Jersey, and it was from him that I purchased a handwritten letter from Walt Whitman to his sister-in-law, Louisa Orr Whitman (see Back Cover). In the letter, Whitman describes how “very nice” he found the chicken he had for supper, and that he had “buckwheat cakes & honey for breakfast.” The letter is not included in Edwin Haviland Miller’s edition of *The Correspondence* (New York: New York University Press, 1961–1977); Miller lists it as one of Whitman’s “lost letters” (see *Correspondence*, 5:427). I exhibited the letter along with other parts of my collection at the Grolier Club in the 1970s, and it was the subject of much admiration. Soon after the exhibition, I received another telephone call from the man in New York; he had heard about the exhibit and my Whitman letter. He told me he was a homosexual, and that he was trying to put together a collection of mementoes of important American homosexuals. He considered Walt Whitman to be in this category, and he still had an interest in my Civil War drawing because Whitman, a volunteer nurse during the Civil War, was pictured standing curiously close to the soldier behind him. He now also had an interest in my letter because he believed the “Lou” that it was addressed to was a male friend of Whitman’s. He thus believed the letter suggested that this male friend was “having good times” with another friend named George, while Walt’s bed was being made up by his “sailor boy Warren.” Actually, of course, the letter suggests no such thing. George is Whitman’s older brother, and Lou is George’s wife, Louisa. Warren is Warren Fritzingler (“Warry,” as Whitman would come to call him), Whitman’s devoted nurse for the last two and a half years of the poet’s life—Warry had begun his duties only a few days before Whitman wrote this letter. “Mrs. D” in the letter is Mary Oakes Davis, Whitman’s live-in housekeeper during his last years. (For the story of Warren and Mary Davis, see Elizabeth Leavitt Keller, *Walt Whitman in Mickle Street* [New York: Mitchell Kennerly, 1921].)

The third Whitman item in my collection is an autographed commemorative dinner menu from the Complimentary Dinner given in honor of Whitman’s 70th birthday in Camden on 31 May 1889 (see Figures 2 and 3). Horace Traubel describes this menu in his book recording the birthday event, *Camden’s Compliment to Walt Whitman* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1889): “. . . there was no ostentation. On the *menu* card a phototype portrait of Whitman stood felicitously alone, without name or word to any effect; and within, opposing (or uniting) influences, foodstuffs ranged as ‘The Feast of Reason,’ and matters of speech as ‘The Flow of Soul’” (p. 11). Most of the addresses and responses listed on the menu are recorded in *Camden’s Compliment*. Though Whitman was too weak to partake of the dinner, he did attend the after-dinner “Flow of Soul” and enjoyed all the praise. I cannot contribute much to Whitman scholarship, but, as a chef, I can offer an authentic recipe for the main

All hail to thee! **WALT WHITMAN!** Poet, Prophet, Priest:  
 Celebrant of Democracy! At more than regal feast  
 To thee we offer homage, and with our greatest lays  
 We crown thee: Poet Laureate in these thy length'ning days.  
 We offer choice ascriptions—our loyal tribute bring,  
 In this the new Olympiad in which thou reignest king.  
 Poet of the present age, and of some yet to be,  
 In this the chosen homestead of those who would be free—  
 Free from feudal usage, from courtly sham and cant;  
 Free from kinglycraft, priestcraft, with all their rot and rant!  
 PROPHET of a race redeemed from all conventional thrall,  
 Expounder of equal seaship in body, soul, and all!  
 PARSEY of a ransom'd people, endued with clearer light;  
 A newer dispensation for those of psychic sight.  
 We greet thee as our mentor, we meet thee as our friend,  
 And to thy ministrations devotedly we lend  
 The aid that comes from fealty which thou hast made so strong,  
 Thine' touch of palm, and glint of eye, and spirit of thy song.  
 We magnify thy mission, we glorify thy aim,  
 Unflinchingly adhered to through ill-report and blame—  
 The fretting of the groundlings, the fuming of the pit,  
 The jibes and jeers and sneers and sneers which men mistake for wit.  
 We know the rising splendor of thy sun could never wane  
 Until, the earth encompass'd, it sunk in dazzling flame.  
 In faith assured we waited as in patience thou didst wait,  
 Knowing full well the answer must sooner come or late.  
 And come it has, sufficiently, the discord disappears,  
 Until to-day again is heard the music of the spheres  
 Proclaiming thee the well-beloved, peer of the proudest peers.



*Walt Whitman  
 May 31 '89*

Figure 2: Cover of menu for Whitman's 70th Birthday Celebration.

## A FEAST OF REASON.

Little Neck Clams on Half Shell.

### SOUP,

Consomme Royal.

### FISH,

Bolled Rock a la Hollandaise.

Cucumber Sauce.

### ROAST,

Spring Lamb. Filet de Bœuf. Potato Snow.

Spinach. Asparagus.

Cauliflower.

### ENTREE,

Broiled Chicken with Mushrooms.

Saratoga Potatoes.

Tomato Sauce.

### DESSERT,

Strawberries with Cream.

### ICE CREAM,

Vanilla.

Frozen Cherries.

Frozen Strawberries.

Fancy Cakes.

Pound Cake.

Almonds.

Raisins.

### FRENCH COFFEE,

Cigars, Etc.

## THE FLOW OF SOUL.

1. ADDRESS OF WELCOME, . . . . . SAM'L. H. GREY.
2. OUR GUEST, . . . . . WALT WHITMAN.
3. OUR FELLOW CITIZEN, . . . . . THOMAS B. HARNED.
4. FRIENDS ACROSS THE SEA, . . . . . HERBERT H. GILCHRIST.
5. PAST AND PRESENT, . . . . . FRANCIS HOWARD WILLIAMS.
6. PROPHECY AND BARD, . . . . . JOHN H. CLIFFORD.
7. LAW—NATURAL and CONVENTIONAL, . . . . . HON. CHAS. G. GARRISON.
8. STATE OF NEW JERSEY, . . . . . HON. LEON ABBETT.

### Impromptu Responses by

- RICHARD WATSON GILDER, CHAS. EMORY SMITH, HAMLIN GARLAND,  
 HENRY L. BONSALL, DR. J. M. RIDGE, E. A. ARMSTRONG,  
 LINCOLN L. EYRE, AND OTHERS.

### Committee:

- H. L. BONSALL, THOS. B. HARNED,  
 ALEX. G. CATTILL, GEOFFREY BULKWALTER, LOUIS T. DESCOUSE,  
 E. A. ARMSTRONG, WILBUR F. ROSE, CYRUS H. K. CURTIS.

Figure 3: Inside of Menu.

entree at the “Feast of Reason”: printed below is the recipe for broiled chicken with mushrooms and tomato sauce, based on and adapted from several American cookbooks from the 1880s used by New York area chefs at the time of Whitman’s 70th birthday—my humble homage to a great poet, a lover of life and a lover of food.

### *BROILED CHICKEN WITH MUSHROOMS AND TOMATO SAUCE*

#### *Ingredients for 4:*

1 fryer (approximately 3½ pounds), cut into 8 serving pieces  
2 teaspoons salt  
½ teaspoon black pepper  
small pinch garlic salt (*not garlic powder*)  
6 tablespoons corn oil  
2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce  
16 medium mushrooms (1 to 1¼ inches in diameter)

#### *FOR THE TOMATO SAUCE:*

2 tablespoons butter  
2 tablespoons flour  
1 tablespoon corn starch  
1 cup white wine  
1 small can (2 ounces) tomato paste  
1 small can (2 ounces) water  
1 bay leaf, broken into pieces  
1 tablespoon minced onion  
1 tablespoon minced celery  
1 tablespoon lemon juice  
½ teaspoon salt  
1½ to 2 teaspoons brown sugar (according to taste)

#### *Method:*

Cut chicken into 8 pieces, by first splitting in half, then separating the drumsticks from the thighs with one cut through the “knee” joint. Finally split each breast half in half, crosswise, resulting in a smaller piece of breast with the wing attached, and a larger piece from the lower part of the breast.

Sprinkle salt, pepper, and garlic salt mixture on the chicken pieces. Rub into the skin and flesh. Let it stand at room temperature for at least an hour; then, add the oil to the Worcestershire sauce and mix. Rub each piece with the oil mixture, so that they are all thoroughly coated. Cover the container and refrigerate for at least 4 to 5 hours, or, if possible, overnight.

Thirty minutes prior to dinner, start to broil the chicken pieces. First, place the thighs and the drumsticks on the broiler rack; five minutes later, add the breast pieces. The chicken should be approximately 6 inches under the source of the heat. Keep turning the pieces, and continue brushing them with the oil marinade.

When the thickest parts of the thigh are done—and no more pink liquid oozes, upon inserting the tip of the knife blade near the bone—brush the mushrooms with the remaining oil and Worcestershire sauce marinade, and place the mushrooms among the chicken pieces for about three minutes. When done, arrange on a platter, letting it stand for 5 to 10 minutes. Then, serve with the tomato sauce in a separate container.

#### *TOMATO SAUCE METHOD:*

In a small saucepan, heat the butter until it bubbles. In a bowl, mix the flour and corn starch with the white wine. Pour a thin, steady stream of the flour mixture into the butter, while stirring constantly with a small wire whip. Add the tomato paste; then, fill up the empty can with water and add to it.

Next, add the pieces of bay leaf, minced onion, and celery, lemon juice, brown sugar; then,

while constantly stirring, bring sauce to a boil. Reduce heat to low. Cover saucepan and let it simmer for 30 to 40 minutes, being careful not to burn the bottom.

Depending upon the quality of the tomato paste used, it may need more water or wine for the desired thickness. Before serving, strain sauce. Discard bay leaf, onions, and celery. Correct seasonings with the addition of some more salt or sugar. Serve with chicken.

*The Bakery Restaurant, Chicago*

LOUIS SZATHMARY (CHEF LOUIS)

## ARTHUR LUNDKVIST'S SWEDISH ODE TO WHITMAN

Writing in the late 1940s about Whitman's influence in Sweden, Frederik Schyberg noted that his impact was first felt "among the Swedish lyricists and prose writers of the so-called 'cult of life' group," especially in the early work of Arthur Lundkvist.<sup>1</sup> Schyberg went on to refer to one particular poem in Lundkvist's 1929 collection, *Naket Liv* [*Naked Life*], "a poem addressed to Whitman which in poetic conciseness and originality can only be compared to Garcia Lorca's famous ode to Whitman." (It is fitting that it would be Lundkvist who would, just after the Second World War, translate Lorca's ode into Swedish.) Schyberg pointed out that Lundkvist continued to write "in the Whitmanesque vein" and became an important critic as well as one of Sweden's most distinguished poets; his critical essays on American writers, including Whitman, have served to introduce generations of Swedish readers to American literature. Schyberg concluded by noting that Lundkvist's work "deserves to be recognized and appreciated outside Scandinavia."<sup>2</sup>

Lundkvist's work has by now certainly gained recognition outside of Scandinavia—it has been translated into French, Spanish, Russian, German, Italian, and many eastern European languages—but it has never received much attention in English-speaking countries. Stephen P. Sondrup, who has worked on one of the few substantial English translations of Lundkvist's poetry, notes that by 1955, the centennial of *Leaves of Grass*, virtually nothing of Lundkvist's was available in English (even though just a year earlier, in 1954, Lundkvist had published a new book of poems with the Whitmanian title *Liv som gras* [*Life as Grass*]), and even today "relatively little of Lundkvist's enormous oeuvre has been presented to the English-speaking world."<sup>3</sup>

Born in 1906, Lundkvist remains to this day an active force in Swedish literature, a member of the Swedish Academy since 1968 and a controversial and outspoken participant in recent Nobel Prize decisions. Like Whitman, Lundkvist came from a humble farm family and had little formal education; he was a voracious reader, but has always felt isolated from academic life and academic writers. He was involved with an active group of young Swedish proletarian writers in the 1920s and 1930s, but was never a doctrinaire socialist writer, developing instead a quite individualistic and unpredictable view of the role of the artist. As was the case with Whitman, Lundkvist often found himself surrounded by revolutionary thinkers and social idealists, but, again like Whitman, he has always managed to go beyond dogmatists of all kinds, grounding himself more in experience than in theory. His description of his artistic stance sounds as if it is echoing Whitman: