



# Walt Whitman's Reconstruction: Poetry and Publishing between Memory and History (Iowa Whitman Series)

*Martin T. Buinicki*

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For Walt Whitman, living and working in Washington, D.C., after the Civil War, Reconstruction meant not only navigating these tumultuous years alongside his fellow citizens but also coming to terms with his own memories of the war. Just as the work of national reconstruction would continue long past its official end in 1877, Whitman's own reconstruction would continue throughout the remainder of his life as he worked to revise his poetic project—and his public image—to incorporate the disasters that had befallen the Union. In this innovative and insightful analysis of the considerable poetic and personal reimagining that is the hallmark of these postwar years, Martin Buinicki reveals the ways that Whitman reconstructed and read the war.

The Reconstruction years would see Whitman transformed from newspaper editor and staff journalist to celebrity contributor and nationally recognized public lecturer, a transformation driven as much by material developments in the nation as by his own professional and poetic ambitions while he expanded and cemented his place in the American literary landscape. Buinicki places Whitman's postwar periodical publications and business interests in context, closely examining his "By the Roadside" cluster as well as *Memoranda During the War* and *Specimen Days* as part of his larger project of personal and artistic reintegration. He traces Whitman's shifting views of Ulysses S. Grant as yet another way to understand the poet's postwar life and profession and reveals the emergence of Whitman the public historian at the end of Reconstruction.

Whitman's personal reconstruction was political, poetic, and public, and his prose writings, like his poetry, formed a major part of the postwar figure that he presented to the nation. Looking at the poet's efforts to absorb the war into his own reconstruction narrative, Martin Buinicki provides striking new insights into the evolution of Whitman's views and writings.

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