

Whitman Interviews Barnum

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that is one of its principal charms. One may perhaps voice the hope that the American will, in spite of the not too subtle British scorn, continue to preserve the Chaucerian phrase and that the phrase will not be restricted to colloquial use. In point of fact, it is not always so restricted. Miss Millay is to be applauded for her use of *I guess* is a distinctly elevated setting:

Their difference now above the board, I guess,  
Discharges what beneath the board is due.

(*Fatal Interview*, Sonnet xxiii)

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### WHITMAN INTERVIEWS BARNUM

On April 28, 1846, the steamer *Great Western* arrived off Sandy Hook after a passage of seventeen days and six hours. Chief among its passengers was P. T. Barnum who with Tom Thumb had invaded and conquered Europe and now was anxious to attract greater attention in America. To further such a purpose this great showman had brought with him "Mlle. Jane, the only living Orang Outang in either England or America,"<sup>1</sup> another drawing card for the American Museum.

It may be surmised that few were more interested in the European experiences of Barnum than the young editor of *The Brooklyn Eagle*. It was not, however, until May 23, 1846, that these two met. Whitman notes what Barnum said in this uncollected item:

BARNUM ON EUROPE.—We saw Mr. Barnum, of [*sic*] Tom Thumb notoriety, manager of the Museum, &c., in New York, day before yesterday. He told us about his tour through all the capitals of Europe, and his intercourse with the kings, queens, and the big bugs. We asked him if anything he saw there made him love Yankeedom less. His gray eyes flashed: "My God!" said he, "no! not a bit of it! Why, sir, you can't imagine the difference.—There everything is frozen—kings and *things*—formal, but absolutely *frozen*: here it is *life*. Here it is freedom, and here are *men*." A whole book might be written on that little speech of Barnum's. (*The Brooklyn Eagle*, Monday, May 25, 1846, p. 2, column 3.)

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<sup>1</sup> *New-York Daily Tribune*, April 29, 1846, p. 4, column 1; p. 3, column 6.