

CORRESPONDENCE

H O R A C E

Published in *The Broadway Journal*
March 8, 1845 (1:10)

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University of Arizona Antebellum Magazine Edition Project
March 3, 2015

To the editor of the Broadway Journal
My Dear Sir:

The following case, in the opinion of many of your subscribers, loudly calls for some censor's correcting rod.

There is in this city a certain young gentleman, who has this winter, for the first time, been introduced to society; or as Seneca would have it, "has left the society of boys to enjoy that of philosophers;" or as an anxious mamma would way of her bud of 'sweet sixteen,'¹ "just been brought out." He is a young man of fine talents, of good appearance, of an easy, agreeable, and manly address, and is very learned for one no older; in short, he is a *gentleman*, and particularly distinguished for a straight-forward, independent manner of expressing his opinions. He has been before the town only seven weeks, and yet no man's society was ever more eagerly courted than his, from the half-starved author shivering in his fifth-story garret, to the rosy-nosed publisher, who, by "turning to commodity" the brains of these same starving authors, is enabled to enjoy a luxuriously furnished mansion, and "fare sumptuously every day."²

But with all my friend's good and shining qualities, he has one bad failing, that I fear will cause him to fall in the estimation of very many of his best friends;-- by *friends* I do not mean associates who eat his meat and drink his wine, but those, who admiring his many good qualities, wish well of him and ever speak well of him behind his back. His failing is this:-- he has become so indoctrinated with opposition to Texas, that whenever he hears the most distant allusion to the subject, or any thing else that by association of ideas, brings it to

¹ The first use of "Sweet sixteen" as a phrase can be found in "Gymnastics"—an 1826 Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine article on the use of gymnastics for posture (Oxford English Dictionary).

² Probable source: "Article 1 -- no 'Title.'" *Literary Cabinet (1806-1807)* Apr 18 1807: 87. *ProQuest*. 22 Feb. 2015. The article in question discusses the unequal distribution of wealth and "punishments" among the populace and the potential repercussions to those in favor by those currently slighted.

mind, he seizes the opportunity to let the company know that *he* is opposed to the measure.³ No matter what the company, or occasion, or place, if he but hear an allusion to Texas, he must, uncle-Toby-like, mount his ever-saddled nag, and frisk away for the entertainment of his auditory, though all the laugh I ever saw him raise was *at* him. He takes vast delight in exhibiting this beast of his, although to my mind he is one of the most hideously deformed animals imaginable.

Last Saturday when he made his seventh appearance in public, while conversing upon a subject having no connexion with annexation, he took occasion to break off in the middle of a sentence, and abruptly tell the company, many of whom were his elders, and far his superiors in information and talents, and withal many of them warm friends of the measure, “that the people declare themselves opposed to the measure,” and that “he discerns a glimpse of morning breaking from the darkness,” for the joint resolution *will not* pass both houses.”⁴ A few minutes afterwards, when the company were considering the literary merits of a young man, who had at some former time said something in favor of Texas, he volunteered to tell us—though we were not discussing the merits of demerits of annexation, but, as said *before*, speaking of a young man who had sometime, to somebody, said something in its favor—“that the measure savored as little of justice as any that could be proposed.”

Now, Mr. Editor, I do not find fault with his opinions, nor for expressing them at proper times and places; but would it not look better of him to let off his extra steam in a political meeting, and give vent to his spleen through the columns of some political journal? I pray you, my dear sir, to ask him, when he attends a literary meeting, or philosophical disquisition, or convivial party, or any mixed company, to have sufficient common civility to keep his politics at home. Many who are exceedingly fond of his company will feel themselves compelled to forego that pleasure if he always carries in his pocket, and at every opportunity offensively thrusts under their noses, a phial of this unsavory partisan stuff. I pray you, Mr. Editor, take your pen from behind your ear, and shake it at this friend of mine, and thereby perhaps make others flutter who are in a similar predicament.

Horace.



³ Referring to the potential annexation of Texas to the United States

⁴ The proposal was a request from the US to the Republic of Texas for annexation and was passed on February 28, 1844—so it is possible that it was passed before this young man makes this vehement statement against it.

EDITOR'S NOTE

“Correspondence” in its general meaning for this text refers to a practice among the periodicals of this time to publish letters—which often read as messages between two acquaintances, such as with the letters from Mr. Garden to Mr. Whitefield (263). Often they were letters from the consumers of the periodical to its editors, with the letter from T.J. to the editor of the *General Magazine* being one of the earliest examples of this practice in America having been published in 1741 (136). Often these letters were anonymous or stylized with only the first name of the author given. For the *Broadway Journal* this habit became a custom after the publication of a letter to the editor by George S Prudence—who, according to his sister Mary Anne Prudence, did not expect his (or her own) letter to be published in the magazine (M. Prudence 111). It seems a habit of the *Broadway Journal* to publish letters to the editor but not always publish responses to the letters—occasionally with multiple letters to the editor, there would only be one published response as in the case of this article. There is no response in successive journals from either the editor or the boy in question.

The young man is decidedly against the annexation of Texas, and at the time that this letter was published, a proposal for annexation had just been issued for Texas’s approval by the United States. Up until the election of James K Polk in 1844 the annexation of Texas had been looked upon with disfavor, most likely due to strong abolitionist opposition. Slavery was a major economic institution in Texas, likely from the 1821 guarantee by Stephen F Austin’s colony that settlers would receive 80 acres of land for every bondsman brought with them to the settlement—resulting in a third of the population of the colony being bondsmen in 1825. When Texas split from Mexico, the constitution they implemented confirmed the colony’s assurance that slaves were the property of their owners. So slavery went hand-in-hand with Texas, and the growing abolitionist movement was leery of letting the colony join (especially as some of the motivation behind annexation may have been to ease the trading of slaves between America and Texas). But with an expansionist president in office, and with British designs to prevent the merge, the proposal had rapidly gained favor (Texas State Historical Association).

While it might be possible that the author of the letter was annoyed by the young man due to his now minority political views, it is more likely that the author actually was trying to address an issue of decorum. The aforementioned letter to the editor by George S Prudence followed similar concerns in its call to action: he asked the editor to condemn the practice his sons have of going out at night to “balls, parties and concerts” instead of staying quietly at home with their family (62). Mary Ann Prudence also asks the editor (twice) to reprimand an acquaintance of hers who constantly creates horrible puns (111). Within the same issue of the *Broadway Journal* as “Correspondence” is a general statement made by Edgar Allen Poe about a recent speech of his. The statement is a challenge to those who are against what Poe was arguing for and gratitude for those who agree. There is a recurring theme of individual matters being brought to the attention of the public.

Which creates a certain irony for “Correspondence”—for one plea the author makes is that his young friend “keep his politics at home” or that he vent his ideas through the medium of a publication instead (Horace 158). There seems to be a slight blurring of the definition of public and private within these works: individual and (arguably) private

arguments are placed in the hands of the public through publications, and yet politics (a public creation) is seen as something to be kept at home. Particularly in “Correspondence” does this become significant, because the line appears to be redrawn by placing publications as a proper outlet for the young man, thus making it almost a “private” venture. Perhaps at this time periodicals were beginning to be seen as the more preferred route because of the potential for anonymity. In face to face conversations there can be no unknowing what a person has expressed, but through publications the thoughts of the public could be expressed without anyone necessarily needing to know what their neighbors and friends think on specific issues. It appears through these works that the authors themselves may not have appreciated this aspect as much as their acquaintances might.

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