

## REVIEWS

BARBARA HENRY. *Walt Whitman's Faces: A Typographic Reading*. Jersey City: Harsimus Press, 2012. 35 pp.

This beautiful book object is a playful, wise, illuminating printing and analysis of the Whitman poem most familiarly known as “Faces” (originally published in the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* as the sixth poem, titled “Leaves of Grass,” then called “Poem of Faces” in 1856, “Leaf of Faces” in 1860, “A Leaf of Faces” in 1867, and “Faces” starting in 1871). It is offered in a limited edition of eighty copies by the New Jersey typographer, printer, and graphic artist Barbara Henry. On the striking rough, heavy orange paper cover (fifty of the copies were prepared with paper covers; the other thirty are in quarter-leather and printed paper-over-boards), we are confronted initially by two faces—linoleum cuts of a young Whitman on the front cover and an elderly Whitman on the back—but as we think about it, we realize the cover actually presents us with *three* faces, since on the spine appears “Walt Whitman’s Faces” in Bulmer typeface. That play on the word *face*—as referring both to human faces and to type faces—is the key to the “typographic reading” of “Faces” that Henry offers. “In this poem,” Henry writes, “Whitman plays out a central metaphor of printshop vocabulary, that the *sort*, or individual piece of type, is a man.”

Henry includes two striking photographs in the book, the first an 1865 photograph of Hudson Street in New York, in which we see at least thirty human faces and every bit as many typefaces, as the humans looking into the camera and the multiple signs on the various stores vie equally for our attention. The second photo, by Henry herself, captures a 2012 New York urban scene, where two human faces are surrounded by a cacophony of typefaces appearing on a vast array of signs. The photos make us keenly aware of how, in urban space, we are confronted continually by not only a diversity of human faces but an equal diversity of typefaces. When juxtaposed to Whitman’s “Faces,” these photos help us suddenly hear in the opening line—“Sauntering the pavement or riding the country by-road, lo, such faces!”—the double meaning of the “faces and faces and faces” that Whitman’s speaker encounters as he passes by people surrounded by the city’s welter of signs, broadsides, notices, and advertisements.

In their illuminating introductory essays, Karen Karbiener and Henry remind us of Whitman’s training as a typesetter and his intimate familiarity with both type itself and with the printer’s idiosyncratic lingo, what Karbiener calls “the humanistic terminology of the print industry: *bodies*, *bellies* and *beards*, *shoulders* and *feet* join *faces* as words with possible double entendres in Whitman’s oeuvre.” Henry notes how “the printshop had its own secret language, in which familiar English words—like ‘face’ and ‘justified’—took on new technical meanings. . . . The parts of the sort were named for parts of the human body: the *body* itself—the rectangular shank of the sort—the *feet*

on which it stands, the *shoulder*, atop the body, and the *beard* supporting the *face*.” So, Karbiener and Henry suggest, Whitman’s poem about “faces” is on some level a poem about print, about how it is impossible for a poem ever to represent human faces without first presenting typefaces. Every human face in Whitman’s catalogue of faces actually strikes our eyes initially as a face of type.

Henry points out that Whitman’s poem contains some subtle references to the omnipresence of type in urban environments—from the labels on the products on the “drug-shelves” to the “banners” that “emerge” “out of this face”—and some unnoticed puns on printer’s dialect (as in the phrase “bosses and tufts,” referring to thick bodies and clusters of type). The culmination of Henry’s “typographic reading,” then, is her astonishing reprinting of Whitman’s poem (she uses the 1855 text with the 1860 title), employing over thirty typefaces in a wide variety of point sizes (and colors), visualizing in type the diversity of faces Whitman captured on his “leaf of faces.” It is a novel experience to read this poem in a form that continually demonstrates Whitman’s understanding of *faces* as always referring both to physiognomy and to print. After encountering this book, readers will always think of the types of faces that appear in “Faces” in a much richer way. Henry’s inclusion here of Whitman’s late poem, “A Font of Type,” in which he celebrates the “pallid slivers” that are “slumbering” in the compositor’s type case, the “unlaunch’d voices” of future poems, and her inclusion of five striking linoleum prints of Whitman make for one of the most impressive acts of Whitman bookmaking in many years. *Walt Whitman’s Faces* is a book that, like Whitman’s own typographically experimental 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, celebrates the ways that wild diversity (of human types and of print types) can share the same leaf.