

ANNOUNCEMENTS

TRANSATLANTIC WHITMAN ASSOCIATION SEMINAR AND SYMPOSIUM, JULY 2011

The Transatlantic Walt Whitman Association will be sponsoring its fourth annual seminar and symposium from July 11-16, 2011, at Universidade Estadual Paulista-UNESP (São Paulo State University) in Araraquara, Brazil (Araraquara is an aboriginal word that means “the home of the sun”). The host will be Maria Clara Bonetti Paro (UNESP), and the teaching team will include Marina Camboni (Università di Macerata), Betsy Erkkila (Northwestern University), Kenneth M. Price (University of Nebraska, Lincoln), and Rodrigo Garcia Lopes, a poet and the Brazilian translator of the First Edition of *Leaves of Grass*. The symposium (July 15-16), “Salut au Monde!: Walt Whitman across Continents,” will be directed by Éric Athenot (Université François-Rabelais, Tours), Ed Folsom (University of Iowa), and Jay Grossman (Northwestern University). The first Transatlantic Whitman Seminar/Symposium was held at TU-Universität Dortmund (Germany) in 2008, followed by Université François-Rabelais, Tours (France, 2009), and Università di Macerata (Italy, 2010). The 2012 seminar/symposium is scheduled for Szczecin University (Poland). Details for application to the seminar and for submitting paper proposals for the symposium will be available in the fall of 2010 on the *WWQR* website (<http://ir.uiowa.edu/wwqr/>).

2011 AMERICAN LITERATURE ASSOCIATION WHITMAN PANELS

The 2011 annual meeting of the American Literature Association will be in Boston from May 26-29. There will be two Whitman panels. Scholars wishing to propose a paper for one of the sessions should send a one-page abstract to Ed Folsom (University of Iowa) at ed-folsom@uiowa.edu by December 1, 2010.

IN MEMORIAM: MARION WALKER ALCARO

Marion Walker Alcaro, author of *Walt Whitman's Mrs. G: A Biography of Anne Gilchrist* (1991), died on December 13, 2009, at the age of 97. She was born on September 20, 1912, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and graduated in 1935 from Sweet Briar College. She married Joseph J. Alcaro, M.D., her husband of 56 years with whom she raised three sons and managed a medical practice, residing for many years in Morristown, New Jersey, and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. During that time, she published a collection of poetry along with numerous articles in *Good Housekeeping*, *Woman's Day*, and *The New Yorker*. At the age of 64, Alcaro entered graduate school, earning a master's degree from Fairleigh Dickinson University, then a second master's from Drew University, and completed her doctorate in English from Drew at the age of 75, publishing her dissertation on Anne Gilchrist four years later. She taught college courses and gave lectures on Whitman studies for more than a decade. In 1994, after her husband's death, she moved to Freedom Village, a retirement community in Holland, Michigan.

Ed Folsom visited Alcaro while in Holland to give a lecture at Hope College in 2005 and found her a fount of new information about Anne Gilchrist and the extended Gilchrist family. She later sent Folsom a comprehensive list of the Gilchrist family archives that she had amassed, and it was clear that she had material for another volume on this family that meant so much to Whitman. Her curiosity and energy remained intense long after *Walt Whitman's Mrs. G* was published. "I don't think anyone among Whitman scholars knew Marion very well," observes Folsom, "but that is part of her charm and mystique: she sat on the edges of the Whitman world, and her book explores the richness of one of those edges."

Kathleen Verduin, professor of English at Hope College, accompanied Folsom on that visit and remembers "how pleased she was to entertain us at her apartment, the way she referred to her walker as her BMW. I thought that was classy." Verduin attended one of Alcaro's last presentations on Gilchrist and recalled "the decorous way she proceeded with the sensitive issues addressed. She was a lady, but her good manners did not inhibit the honesty of her scholarship."

Alcaro's scholarship offered a new portrait of Gilchrist that treated her as more than an awkward episode in the biography of Whitman. Alcaro showed how Gilchrist played an important role in the establishment of Whitman's reputation and how she was an important voice in discussions of sexuality and women's rights in the Victorian era. "As Anne Gilchrist comes into focus," Alcaro wrote, "she emerges not only from the shadows of Alexander Gilchrist and Walt Whitman but from the confines of her age."

Michael Robertson, author of *Worshipping Walt: The Whitman Disciples*, noted the increasing importance of Alcaro's work, almost two decades after its publication: "A sudden, surprising spurt of articles about Anne Gilchrist has appeared in recent years, including work by Suzanne Ashworth in *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, Max Cavitch in *Victorian Poetry*, and Steven Marsden in *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*. Those projects are unimaginable without the

spadework of Marion Alcaro. Before Alcaro's book, Gilchrist was little more than a punchline in Whitman scholarship—"that pathetic Victorian lady" is typical of the commentary. Marion Alcaro took Gilchrist seriously—saw her as the brilliant, passionate woman she was—and devoted years to researching her life, giving us the results in a book with an engaging narrative and meticulous scholarship."

In her final years, Robertson spoke on the phone with Alcaro a few times in the course of writing about Gilchrist in *Worshipping Walt*. He described her as "friendly, modest about her accomplishments, and generous with her insights and resources." "Unable to find any image of Gilchrist," Robertson "asked her where she'd gotten the photograph for her book's jacket, and within days an 8x10 glossy appeared in the mail." I am sure Robertson is joined by the entire Whitman community in saying, "Thank you, Marion; you led the way."

Memorial contributions may be sent to the Marion W. Alcaro Ph.D. Endowment Scholarship Fund and forwarded to 185 Tiffany Lane, Gettysburg, PA 17325, c/o Nancy Hendricks.

—William Pannapacker, *Hope College*

