

REVIEWS

WALT WHITMAN. *The Correspondence*. Volume 7. Edited by Ted Genoways. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004. xxiv + 192 pp.

If you've had difficulty locating the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* supplement to the Whitman correspondence that you tucked in next to the six volumes of the New York University Press edition of Whitman's letters, or if you have tried to remember just which issue of *WWQR* included Whitman's letter to Reuben Farwell, your problems are over: Volume 7 of *The Correspondence* is here and gathers these dispersed letters into one place. Edited by Ted Genoways and with a foreword by Ed Folsom, the handsome book comes to us from the University of Iowa Press as part of the Iowa Whitman Series. Its outer appearance exactly matches that of the New York University Press *Collected Writings* volumes, retaining the familiar red binding and typeface on the spine, with pages that duplicate the type, numbering system, and format of the previous books. While a work to be valued in its own right, this is also a worthy tribute to the years of research and editing by Edwin Haviland Miller who brought us six volumes of *The Correspondence* and who died in 2001.

Those six volumes, the first dating to 1961, were part of *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman*, and in his foreword Ed Folsom speaks for all of us when he bemoans the current state of that project as "hopelessly scattered, fragmented, and incomplete" (vii). The news that none of the general editors or members of the project's advisory board remain alive underscores the sense of loss occasioned by the frequent notices of deaths of Whitman scholars. Thankfully, a new generation appears, among them Ted Genoways, who has included in the present work all the letters Miller had gathered for the volume and has added a substantial number, some 100, of his own unearthing. Readers of Volume 7 will find their work facilitated by a prefacing list of the poet's correspondents with identifying letter numbers, as well as a complete index. End materials include a highly valuable revised (in 2003) Calendar of Letters to Whitman, now covering the years 1840 to 1892, with information on each letter, its writer, current location, and where it has appeared in print.

Not only has Genoways followed the editorial style of the other volumes of *Correspondence*, he has duplicated the meticulous and thorough manner of the earlier footnotes and annotations so that we have thumbnail sketches of those less familiar among Whitman's correspondents. Thus, on page 106, we have explicit information on a Broad Street, New York City, tool manufacturing firm, its owner and his history, as background to a note from Whitman acknowledging an order for *Leaves of Grass* from one of the firm's employees. Where possible, citations are made to works offering further information on individuals and events referred to in the letters. The editor provides another service in his Introduction where he succinctly recaps the *Correspondence* history and provides a fascinating look into the ways in which the present volume

was researched. Perhaps most interesting is learning of the role played by auction houses and their catalogs, and of the increasing online availability of all sorts of finding aids, which, Genoways tells us, is the most likely future direction for subsequent additions to this series of letters.

The 121 pages of letters bring us into Whitman's life in that uniquely personal way such materials do. Here we have the full texts of letters from the young schoolmaster Whitman to his friend Abraham Leech, written from rural Long Island ("cursed Woodbury!") in the summer of 1840, when he longed to shake off the dust of his farming environment and return to the city. There are letters written during the Civil War, one to Ralph Waldo Emerson where Whitman asks for letters of introduction that he might present to cabinet members in the Lincoln administration. With amazing audacity he offers suggested wording for the letter—to Emerson!—who chose to write, in his own words, a far more generous introduction. There are wartime letters to mother and brother, the latter a long and moving discussion of family troubles to his favorite brother, Jeff, to newspapers on the condition of soldiers held as prisoners of war, and to a soldier friend who has recovered from his injuries and returned home.

From the years subsequent to the war's conclusion there are many letters concerning the "business," one might say, of being a poet. These have to do with the submission of poems to literary outlets, the acknowledgment and fulfillment of orders for *Leaves of Grass*, a proposed English edition of *Leaves* that would please its author more than that of William Rossetti, and a letter written to John Burroughs in December, 1882, in which Whitman claims he no longer feels the need to "meddle" with his book further. The summer of the following year finds the poet in varying moods—of nostalgia, evidenced in a touching letter to Peter Doyle; and of prescience, as he writes to the organizers of a celebration of the 333rd anniversary of the founding of Santa Fe, New Mexico, his belief that, "To that composite American identity of the future, Spanish character will supply some of the most needed parts" (70).

One of the more captivating aspects of these letters is the way they reveal Whitman's unflagging attention to the details of printing. Early editions of *Leaves* were personally supervised in their making by the author but this changed with advancing age. We know, from previously published correspondence, bolstered by the additions in this volume, of his failing health and the physical discomfort he endured in his late years. Yet, as late as 1891, Whitman is found here directing, by letter, details of type setting (and showing no little annoyance with the job being done) for *Good-Bye My Fancy*. One letter to a printer has instructions for the composition of a photo card bearing a photograph of the recently purchased tomb at Harleigh.

Many of the new letters are to familiar names, such as Charles Eldridge, Horace Traubel, John Burroughs, and William Sloane Kennedy, but some are directed to individuals who do not surface elsewhere and whose relationship to Whitman remain, at this time, unknown. One of the latter, a Mrs. Colquitt, suffered such adversity as to arouse the poet's compassion and he sent five dollars for her and her infant. And there are more letters to his sister Hannah Heyde, each of which ends with a reference to the enclosed two dollars. Touching though such pieces of correspondence are, there is something that goes

straight to the reader's heart at the words written in September of 1891 to Dr. John Johnston in Bolton, England, concerning the enclosed proof sheets; they are, Whitman says with finality, from "the forthcoming & really last & completed ed'n of L of G, Love to you & all the friends, WW" (118).

It is the reviewer's unhappy task to note that even in so carefully edited a volume as this, several errors and omissions occur. On page 97 there is a letter in which Whitman writes to thank William Sloane Kennedy for his "translation" and refers to "M. Sarrazin." Gabriel Sarrazin and his article, "Walt Whitman," published in *La Nouvelle Revue* on May 1, 1888, go unidentified, and Whitman's comment that Sarrazin's article "is a great steady trade wind hurrying the slip into port" should surely read "the ship" (and the citation to the previously known partial transcript of this letter should refer to Volume 4 of *The Correspondence*, not Volume 5). The omission of a December 5, 1872, letter from Whitman to Alfred Webb of Dublin, Ireland, published for the first time in my *Whitman and the Irish* (2000), serves to validate the editor's point, however, that one of the distinct advantages of the electronic medium is its "infinite expandibility [which] no longer limits the range of what may be included" (xvi). If, indeed, this is to be the last of the print editions of Whitman's correspondence, it takes its place worthily beside its predecessors.

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M. JIMMIE KILLINGSWORTH. *Walt Whitman and the Earth: A Study in Ecopoetics*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004. xii + 225 pp.

In this timely, elegant addition to the Iowa Whitman Series, Jimmie Killingsworth merges his deep knowledge of Whitman's poetry and environmental rhetoric to give "a reconsideration of Whitman's language in light of an ecological understanding of the world and a reconsideration of that world through the lens of Whitman's mighty language" (5). The double aim, admirably achieved, will make this slim book interesting both for Whitman scholars and for ecocritics. Following Kenneth Burke, Killingsworth sees the process of identification as entangled with division, discord, and domination; the result is a fresh reading of Whitman's tropes of identity over the length and breadth of his poetic career.

The subtitle identifies the theoretical orientation as "ecopoetics," which Killingsworth defines as primarily phenomenological and concerned with the cognitive, moral, and mystical limits of knowing the objects of the earth through language. The limitations of language emerge in the "unspeakableness of things," as in the unspeakably offensive "something" that confronts the poet in the 1856 "This Compost." In Chapter 1, "This Compost" becomes Killingsworth's proof text for ecopoetics, for his reading shows how Whitman confronts the limits of his own poetic figuration in order to find new possibilities of understanding his relationship to the things of the earth. The analysis of "This Compost" relies on Bill Brown's 2001 essay "Thing Theory," but it relies even more on Killingsworth's own intelligent sensitivity to language.