

“democratic experiment” to larger concerns bearing more directly on the major themes: it extended to human behavior at its most basic.

From its first publication to its final revisions, “Song of Myself”—to mention only the major poem—contained passages profoundly critical of the ways of humanity. Consider, for example, the eight lines beginning “I think I could turn and live with animals.” It is a stunning critique of human follies as Whitman perceived them. This is no simplistic optimist; the implied denunciation of human behavior is scathing.

One could go on. “Song of Myself” is a song of possibility, like *Walden*; the actuality is often dark and disturbing, as in, for example, the picture of the living dead from “Song of Myself,” Section 41 (a passage preserved from 1855 with only one minor change of punctuation):

Here and there with dimes on the eyes walking,  
To feed the greed of the belly the brains liberally spooning,  
Tickets buying or taking or selling, but in to the feast never once going.  
Many sweating, ploughing, thrashing, and then the chaff for payment receiving,  
A few idly owning, and they the wheat continually claiming.

The grotesquery of the first two lines might appeal to Swift, while the last two would do credit to Karl Marx. There is plenty of the unsafe, subversive Whitman available, even without going beyond the “deathbed” edition; and if that’s the Whitman you want (and there are of course others: the tenderest lover, the Bohemian, the Good Gray Poet, the Wound-Dresser, the Bard, etc.), you will regret the omission of any materials that would serve to reinforce this characterization.

What all this goes to show is that there are depths to Whitman that demand continued recognition; and insofar as *The Neglected Walt Whitman* pays tribute to Whitman’s range, it makes a worthy contribution. As with any major poet, readers will find in Whitman the poet that speaks to *them*, as individuals—which is not to say that what’s found is all there is.

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

ROBERTS W. FRENCH

A. S. ASH, ed. *The Original 1855 Edition of Leaves of Grass*. Santa Barbara, California: Bandanna Books, 1992. 117 pp.

For Walt Whitman, 1992 was a banner year, what with the national and international conferences, the many formal and informal readings of the master’s work, the biographical and critical reassessments, the laboratory enhanced reproductions of a wax-cylinder recording of the poet’s actual voice, the tributes of network television and National Public Radio, and so on. Amid the sometimes high profile goings-on of the Whitman Centennial, Bandanna Books, without fanfare, issued a new edition of the first (1855) *Leaves of Grass*. It is not a facsimile reprinting, and thus it differs from those published by The Eakins Press (1966), the Chandler Publishing Company (1968), and the Library of American Poets (1992). The edition bears some resemblance, at least in size and general appearance, to that published in 1959 by Malcolm Cowley. In the

end, though, the *Bandanna Leaves* is a singular production, notable chiefly as an example of Political Correctness that has run amok. The reader of this edition may well begin to feel like a character in a Poe short story, periodically experiencing a thrill of mad hilarity, or of horror.

The text of this *Leaves* is preceded not by an introduction but by an "Editor's Note." In the note, ironically, the claim is made that editing has been kept to a minimum. However, the reader is promptly informed that "some spellings (i.e., *loafe*) have been modernized, and Whitman's language, though remarkably nonsexist for his time, has been humanized where appropriate (i.e., *human* or *person* substituted for *man* when the context clearly indicates no sexual reference is intended). Humanist personal pronouns (*hu*, *hus*, *hum*, pronounced *who*, *whose*, *whom*) have been substituted in cases where distinction of gender is ambiguous, irrelevant or misleading." There is no discussion of the nature or extent of sexist usage to be found in Whitman. No rationale is offered for the "humanization" of the poet's language. The editor leaves unaddressed the aesthetic and ethical questions arising from the practice of freely altering an established writer's words.

Perhaps needless to say, the sort of minimal editing described by A. S. Ash results in maximal changes in the Preface and the twelve (untitled) poems of the 1855 *Leaves*. For example, in the Preface, one of *the* most important statements in the history of American poetic theory, note in a familiar passage the effect of the changes:

The direct trial of hum who would be the greatest poet is today. If hu does not flood himself with the immediate age as with vast oceanic tides . . . and if hu does not attract hus own land body and soul to humself and hang on its neck with incomparable love and plunge hus semitic muscle into its merits and demerits . . . and if hu be not humself the age transfigured . . . and if to hum is not opened the eternity which gives similitude to all periods and locations and processes and animate and inanimate forms, and which is the bond of time, and rises up from its inconceivable vagueness and infiniteness in the swimming shape of today, and is held by the ductile anchors of life, and makes the present spot the passage from what was to what shall be, and commits itself to the representation of this wave of an hour and this one of the sixty beautiful children of the wave—let hum merge in the general run and wait hus development . . .

In several sentences here the humanist substitutions come within an ace of reducing the remarks to gibberish. Readers approaching the 1855 Preface for the first time will find themselves puzzling over such passages, their attempt to ascertain Whitman's meaning made doubly difficult by the odd pronouns. Readers well acquainted with the Preface will find such passages, at the very least, startling, difficult to connect to their sense of the original. Sheer amazement no doubt will be their response to the revisions made in the Preface's famous last line: "The proof of a poet is that hus country absorbs hum as affectionately as hu has absorbed it."

Alterations made in the poems are no less dramatic, no less disconcerting. Several of the most dubious changes occur in the poem that eventually would be entitled "Song of Myself." Instead of the original lines that read "Tenderly will I use you curling grass, / It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men . . . ," the *Bandanna* edition gives us "Tenderly will I use you curling

grass, / It may be you transpire from the breasts of young people. . . .” Instead of “The friendly and flowing savage . . . Who is he? / Is he waiting for civilization or past it and mastering it?” Bandanna offers these lines: “The friendly and flowing savage . . . Who is hu? / Is hu waiting for civilization or past it and mastering it?”

There are a number of passages in *Leaves of Grass* in which Whitman is intentionally indefinite about the gender of those whom he describes. Nevertheless, the poet himself no doubt would be dumbfounded by the following passage, drawn from the poem finally entitled (in 1871) “The Sleepers”:

I see a beautiful gigantic swimmer swimming naked through the eddies of the sea,  
Hus brown hair lies close and even to hus head . . . hu strikes out with courageous  
arms . . . hu urges humself with hus legs.

I see hus white body . . . I see hus undaunted eyes;  
I hate the swift-running eddies that would dash hum headforemost on the rocks.  
What are you doing you ruffianly red-trickled waves?  
Will you kill the courageous giant? Will you kill hum in the prime of hus middle age?

Given the anomalies of such a passage, one wonders what slouching, rough beast would be born if Ash’s editorial policies were applied to the third (1860) edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which contains the gender-centered “Enfans d’Adam” and “Calamus” sections.

The 1855 poem that became known in 1871 as “There Was a Child Went Forth” has long been viewed as one of Whitman’s most biographical efforts. To tinker with its pronouns, therefore, is decidedly to alter its purport, at least for most readers. Perusing just a few of the poem’s lines, one can observe what happens:

Hus own parents . . . he that had propelled the fatherstuff at night, and fathered  
hum . . . and she that conceived hum in her womb and birthed hum . . . they gave  
this child more of themselves than that,  
They gave hum afterward every day . . . they and of them became part of hum.

Quite possibly *the* most grotesque emendation in the Bandanna *Leaves* appears in the conclusion of the poem eventually (in 1871) called “Faces.” Whitman’s original lines are as follows:

The melodious character of the earth!  
The finish beyond which philosophy cannot go and does not wish to go!  
The justified mother of men!

In the lines as revised, Ash converts the last into something appropriate to a comic book balloon:

The melodious character of the earth!  
The finish beyond which philosophy cannot go and does not wish to go!  
The justified mother of hu-men!

If an editor feels compelled to make a substitution here, a far better word choice than *hu-men*, or so it seems, would be *humans* or *persons* or, quite simply, *men and women*.

Well-intentioned though they may be, the revisions in this edition of the 1855 *Leaves* have about them a light, sometimes even comic, quality. Upon encountering again and again the “humanist pronouns”—*hu*, *hus*, *hum*—, I frequently found myself recalling the famous Bud Abbott and Lou Costello routine, “Who’s on First?” Eventually I began to work out my own routine, a politically correct one at that, with *Hu* on first, *Hus* on second, and *Hum* on third. *Hu-wee* (pronounced *hoey*) ended up at short. On the other hand, the revisions have about them a dark, frightful quality. They seem, at bottom, Orwellian. Appropriately enough, at the end of 1984, in an “Appendix” titled “The Principles of Newspeak,” George Orwell discusses the language of totalitarianism, commenting on how Ingsoc (English Socialist) Party members had begun to develop a vocabulary consisting of “words which had been deliberately constructed for political purposes: words, that is to say, which not only had in every case a political implication, but were intended to impose a desirable mental attitude upon the person using them.” Near the end of this essay, Orwell talks of the progress being made toward translating classic literature into Newspeak words and grammatical constructions:

A good deal of the literature of the past was, indeed, already being transformed in this way. Considerations of prestige made it desirable to preserve the memory of certain historical figures, while at the same time bringing their achievements into line with the philosophy of Ingsoc. Various writers, such as Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Byron, Dickens and some others were therefore in process of translation; when the task had been completed, their original writings, with all else that survived of the literature of the past, would be destroyed. These translations were a slow and difficult business, and it was not expected that they would be finished before the first or second decade of the twenty-first century.

To invoke the name of Orwell may be to overstate the case against A. S. Ash’s edition. After all, the primary motive behind the edition—the repudiation of sexist language—can only be regarded as laudable. Nevertheless, there remains something ominous about the book. It is certainly not the collection of poems toward which to direct beginning students of Whitman. Scholars, though, may find the reprinting of some interest. If anyone ever undertakes a study of the expurgated, adulterated, or otherwise altered versions of *Leaves of Grass*, the edition by Bandanna Books will be, for that scholar, a central text.

*University of Wisconsin-Parkside*

DONALD D. KUMMINGS

JOYCE W. WARREN. *Fanny Fern: An Independent Woman*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992. xiv + 374 pp.

Up until recently, Whitman has been considered, by and large, a “man’s poet,” with numerous articles referring to Whitman’s devotion to the father-stuff. Things are changing, however, as scholars have begun to read *Leaves of Grass*