

The poet shuns radiant chords.
He jostles with brass, lashes the drum shrilly.
He arouses the people with chopped sentences.

Recalling Whitman, Becher's text also recalls Emerson's call to which Whitman responded. But it is a far cry from the American Whitmanians of the same time, either the Sandburg sentimentalists or the finely honed imagists. Grünzweig's complex, thorough, and fascinating study constantly recalls the need for comparative studies to immerse themselves in national, historic, and social contexts, and reminds us of what is entailed in reading interculturally. This is must reading, not only for Germanists, but indeed for anyone interested in Whitman's "reputation" and in the nature of poetic influence and cultural reception.

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SAM ABRAMS, ed. *The Neglected Walt Whitman: Vital Texts*. New York, Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993. viii + 200 pp.

"Who learns my lesson complete?" Not the general reader, Sam Abrams asserts, for he argues that the most widely available texts of Whitman's works distort through omission, leaving out material of the highest significance and thereby misrepresenting Whitman "as a much less radical thinker and much less conscious artist than he in fact was." In particular, Professor Abrams argues that these texts—he cites in particular the editions published by the Modern Library and the Library of America—deny the reader full access to "two aspects of Whitman's life and work that the poet sought to conceal, or, at least, obscure: his commitment to male-male sexual love, and, most surprisingly, an intense negativity, a furious indignation, profoundly doubtful of the entire democratic experiment."

In support of his contentions, the editor offers in this volume "Old Age Echoes," poems and passages that Whitman omitted from *Leaves of Grass*, two manuscript poems ("Pictures" and "Poem of Existence"), and a handful of prose works: two of Whitman's reviews of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, *An American Primer*, and the pseudonymous "Walt Whitman in Camden," written under the name "George Selwyn" in 1885. Some of these selections, it will be noted, bear upon the two aspects of Whitman's life and work cited above, while others do not. The fact is that these two aspects, while no doubt of the highest significance and of great interest to a contemporary reader, fill only a relatively few pages in the body of Whitman's work.

Anyway, there is significant material in *The Neglected Walt Whitman*, and it would be ungrateful to complain about having it available in this volume. It should be pointed out, however, that all the poems included in this collection and also the two 1855 reviews have been widely available since 1965 in the "Comprehensive Reader's Edition" of *Leaves of Grass* edited by Sculley Bradley and Harold W. Blodgett, published first by the New York University Press, then born again in 1973 as the Norton Critical Edition paperback. "Old Age Echoes" and the poems excluded from *Leaves of Grass* were also published in

Whitman's *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, edited by James E. Miller, Jr. (1959), and in *Walt Whitman: The Complete Poems*, edited by Francis Murphy (1975). *An American Primer* was printed as a separate volume by City Lights Books in 1970 and also by Holy Cow! Press in 1987. Other examples could be cited.

Abrams makes clear, however, what has prompted his book into being: it is Justin Kaplan's edition of Whitman's *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*, published by the Library of America in 1982. Since this volume is well on its way to becoming the standard text, Abrams finds its shortcomings to be of particular importance; the book and its editor come in for severe castigation during the course of Abrams's forty-page introduction. Some of the criticism seems quirky, as when the book is blamed for being too big ("Way too bulky, way too heavy") and yet too small ("by any objective standard it is seriously, shockingly incomplete"). The omissions found so disturbing include the lack of a portrait (Abrams gives us the 1855 Hollyer engraving) and failure to include the materials collected in *The Neglected Walt Whitman: Vital Texts*.

Abrams argues that the omission of these texts constitutes a severe distortion of Whitman at his greatest, "Whitman entire, in all his contrarities, the unsafe Whitman, Whitman the subversive." The editor's intention is that the reader will use *The Neglected Walt Whitman* along with Kaplan's *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose* in order to gain insight into a truly complete Whitman.

Fair enough. Kaplan's book contains God's plenty, but one might wish that space had been found for "Old Age Echoes" at least; and to be sure, the texts in *The Neglected Walt Whitman* extend our sense of Whitman's range somewhat, simply by giving us more Whitman and by including some works and passages that demand attention (perhaps most notably, among the poems, "Respondez!" and the great *cri de couer* excluded from Calamus, "Hours continuing long, sore and heavy-hearted"); but one might ask whether the aspects of Whitman claimed to have been neglected—the "male-male sexual love" and the "intense negativity" directed at "the entire democratic experiment"—have really been so neglected after all, and whether the texts in *The Neglected Walt Whitman* really make so much difference as is claimed for them.

The importance of "male-male sexual love" is surely sufficiently present in *Leaves of Grass*, along with the male-male love that is not necessarily sexual, or not sexual at all; this theme has long been readily available in, for example, prominent poems like "Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances," "Recorders Ages Hence," "When I Heard at the Close of the Day," and "Earth, My Likeness." Whitman's skills at concealment cannot be denied, but still, he revealed much. While it is good to have the excluded poems available, their themes are not absent from others that Whitman retained (although, as noted above, the actual *number* of such poems is surprisingly few, considering the power and interest of the theme).

And as for Whitman's "furious indignation," unquestionably it advances one's understanding to know that he was capable of striking such a note, although it is not among his major themes. There is of course a great deal more to Whitman than the ecstatic celebrant so widely taken to be the *whole*; as Abrams rightly notes, "Too often Whitman is read as a simplistic optimist." The fact is, however, that Whitman's indignation extended far beyond the

“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.

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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