

especially in the accuracy and clarity with which Nathanson rehearses critical readings of Wordsworth. But the real point of the comparison escapes me, for the counter-example of Wordsworth does not add any specificity or layering to Nathanson's account of Whitman's image of voice. So far as I can see, the chapter merely repeats points made previously, though it does so in a new context. Indeed, the comparative project begun in this chapter seems to belong in another book.

The winnowing could also be conducted on the level of style, and the result would be a more focused, coherent book. One of Nathanson's strengths as a critic is to resist the overly neat formulations of previous critics, but his weaknesses are a tendency to digress, a tendency to repeat the same point several times at wide intervals, and a tendency to understand better than he explains. Since Nathanson clearly believes that the first two editions of *Leaves* present the best evidence for the "word magic" he describes, and since he openly claims that the 1856 edition is less successful at creating this type of magic than the 1855 edition (406), I personally would have hoped for a more detailed and coherent account of how and why those two editions resemble one another and differ from one another. Then this particular version of the standard narrative concerning Whitman's post-War career (366-500) might be persuasive. And then Nathanson's account of the word magic of the first two editions would be as clear as it is suggestive.

Lurking within the 532 pages of this very fine book is a 300-page masterpiece. I recommend that every serious student of Whitman's work try to determine which 300 pages that would be.

Washington and Lee University

JAMES PERRIN WARREN

M. JIMMIE KILLINGSWORTH. *The Growth of Leaves of Grass: The Organic Tradition in Whitman Studies*. Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1993.

M. Jimmie Killingsworth has performed a valuable service for the Whitman scholarly community by writing the *Leaves of Grass* volume in the Camden House "Literary Criticism in Perspective" series. This series sets out to "trace literary scholarship and criticism" on various writers and major works, and it aspires "to gauge the influence of social and historic currents on aesthetic judgments once thought objective and normative." Killingsworth is quite effective in demonstrating the contingent and changing nature of Whitman criticism during its first hundred and thirty years, revealing how any particular version of Whitman "depend[s] largely upon the historical conditions under which he has been received."

Killingsworth organizes his study around "the theory of organicism," which he argues most Whitman critics have picked up from Whitman himself and have used as a paradigm when interpreting and assessing his work. Killingsworth's subtitle, "The Organic Tradition in Whitman Studies," is a bit misleading, however, since he also traces the tradition of *opposition* to the organic critics. One of the real contributions of this book, in fact, is the suggestion that the dichotomy between the organic and the mechanical readers—roughly, those who saw Whitman's poetry as a spontaneous flowering of genius and those who

saw it instead as a carefully controlled architectonics—occurred at the very inception of Whitman criticism, when Richard Maurice Bucke presented “Whitman as a great artificer” in contradistinction to John Burroughs, who worked “to remove . . . any hint of the mechanical and artificial” from Whitman’s achievement. Killingsworth demonstrates that there is an ongoing dialectic between those who put their faith in Whitman as a natural, naive, untutored, primitive genius and those who find Whitman to be a clever, skilled, calculating, cunning, and even scheming craftsman. In the organic tradition, Whitman is seen as a poet whose powerful works overwhelmed him; in the mechanical tradition, he is viewed as a poet very much in control of all the effects and affects of his work. Recent criticism on Whitman, Killingsworth shows, suggests that the mechanical tradition may be winning out after a long domination by the organicists. Narratives of the mysterious origins of Whitman’s genius have given way to historical, cultural, and rhetorical explanations.

In this book, Killingsworth uses the term “organic” in a more general sense, too, pointing to the innumerable organic metaphors that critics have employed when discussing Whitman’s life, career, and *Leaves of Grass* itself: tropes of evolution, composition and decomposition, cycles of growth, seeds and flowers, that have taken on a life of their own in overviews of Whitman’s work. The fact that Whitman structured his book on an organic metaphor—the book as leaves of grass—“authorizes” the organicism of critics, but also makes them vulnerable to a charge of collusion, of capitulation to Whitman’s own preferred interpretation of his life and work. Killingsworth roughs out “three strains of organicism” in the critical tradition: genetic (those critics who seek “an essential center of being” to explain Whitman and his work); progressive (those critics who focus on the growth of Whitman’s career, tracking a movement from unpromising beginnings to flourishing success); and cyclic (those critics who follow out the stages of growth and decline). This classification of the organic tradition is less helpful than it at first seems, leading to some unfortunate imperatives of category. The “strains of organicism” occasionally lead to critical straining on Killingsworth’s part as he coerces books into one or the other category, when in fact the organic metaphors are so pervasive and so mixed that pigeonholing comes to seem a meaningless game. At times, Killingsworth even searches for the elusive “master narrative” of Whitman criticism, but these categorical efforts are far less illuminating than his keen and concise critiques of specific central texts in Whitman criticism.

The book is divided into chapters investigating “Whitman the man, the poet, the prophet, the ideologue, [and] the language experimenter.” The chapter on Whitman biography works through William Douglas O’Connor’s, John Burroughs’s, and Richard M. Bucke’s early efforts on up to Justin Kaplan’s and Paul Zweig’s 1980s biographies. Gay Wilson Allen’s 1955 *The Solitary Singer* (“still widely held to be the standard biography of the poet”) understandably gets most of Killingsworth’s attention; less clear is why Kaplan and Zweig get so little attention (one short paragraph each, compared to eight pages for Allen). Because Killingsworth does offer a full and illuminating discussion of the psychobiographies by Edwin Haviland Miller, Stephen Black, and David Cavitch, this chapter is a useful supplement to Gay Allen’s “The Growth of Walt Whitman Biography” chapter in his *New Walt Whitman Handbook* (1975).

(Allen's chapter, however, is more comprehensive, dealing with biographies by John Bailey, Edgar Lee Masters, Frances Winwar, and others who are not mentioned in Killingsworth's book.)

One problem with critical overviews, of course, is that they are outdated by the time they appear. Since such book-length overviews are published so infrequently, there is always the danger that they canonize a particular set of critical books at just a time when a new set of books is about to appear that may alter many of the conclusions that appear reasonable today. In the area of biography, for example, Killingsworth was unable to include a discussion of Philip Callow's new *From Noon to Starry Night*, and in the next few years, at least three other major biographies of Whitman are due to appear. The same is true in other areas of Whitman criticism; major new studies of Whitman's relation to American art, to photography, and to other nineteenth-century cultural patterns, have just appeared or will be appearing soon. The recent explosion in Whitman scholarship has been of such a magnitude that Killingsworth's fine overview is destined to quickly become dated.

As a snapshot of the current moment of an ongoing process, however, a project like this one has real value. It's vital for any such snapshot to have a wide angle of vision, to be as inclusive and as comprehensive as possible. Killingsworth begins by asserting that his book "does not pretend to be a complete critical guide to Whitman studies" (ix), but he does in fact deal with most of the major critical and biographical books. Inevitably, there are some odd oversights. E. Fred Carlisle's *The Uncertain Self: Whitman's Drama of Identity* (1973) would seem to have earned at least a mention, as has Thomas Brasher's *Whitman as Editor of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (1970), which influenced many biographical and cultural studies. Killingsworth's decision to focus only on books skews his diachronic narrative of Whitman scholarship, since some of the major insights and discoveries appeared in articles long before they were embodied in book-length studies. Even Gay Wilson Allen has admitted that Randall Jarrell's *Kenyon Review* essay on Whitman was probably more influential than Allen's biography in generating a positive view of Whitman in the 1950s, but Killingsworth ignores Jarrell and most other poets' responses to Whitman (and all the books *about* poets' responses to Whitman—so studies like Agnieszka Salska's *Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson* or Diane Middlebrook's *Walt Whitman and Wallace Stevens* or even James E. Miller, Jr.'s, Bernice Sloté's, and Karl Shapiro's *Start with the Sun* are left out). We get a clear overview of "Whitman the poet," but no hint of "Whitman the poet's poet."

Many of the summaries of the various books read like full and discrete book reviews—there are trenchant and illuminating critiques of books by Richard Chase, James E. Miller, Jr., Floyd Stovall, Jerome Loving, Kenneth Price, Lewis Hyde, George Hutchinson, and James Perrin Warren, among others. The least satisfactory summary, not surprisingly, is of Killingsworth's own book (*Whitman's Poetry of the Body*), and his concerns in that book get in the way of equitable treatment of related books. Betsy Erkkila's *Whitman the Political Poet*, for example, is accorded only a few paragraphs, which focus on her feminist critique of Whitman (a relatively minor part of the argument of the book); this focus allows Killingsworth to set up Erkkila's book as a counterpoint to his own instead of viewing it on its own terms. Killingsworth's

expertise in and bias toward rhetorical and discourse studies draws him to studies like Kerry Larson's, to which he devotes five full pages, even though Larson's book has not had nearly the impact of Erkkila's (or of Wynn Thomas's, which garners only two pages). But such implicit judgments, of course, are the very heart of a book like this, even if the format suggests the kind of objectivity and evenhandedness that Killingsworth is debunking in the criticism. Killingsworth sets out to unveil the biases and historical contingencies of Whitman critics over the years, while he generally tries to camouflage his own (this book, too, will inevitably take its place among the historically contingent).

The pleasures of this study come from Killingsworth's critical acumen and his impressive grasp of the unwieldy bulk of Whitman criticism; he articulates patterns and trends in some brilliant flashes of insight. "In Whitman studies," he notes, "the New Criticism has yielded, for the most part, to rhetorical criticism, an analysis of how meaning flows (consciously or unconsciously) from an author to an audience through the mediating patterns and structures of the poems' language, a medium that shifts according to the exigencies of a changing rhetorical situation." He notes how one notorious attempt to discredit Whitman—Esther Shephard's 1938 *Walt Whitman's Pose*, which argued that Whitman stole his persona from George Sand's *Countess of Rudolstadt*—may in fact have helped to usher in the now-dominant view of Whitman as a master of disguise, a fluid identity at home in many roles: "In her attempt to undermine Whitman's reputation, Shephard may have helped it."

And Killingsworth points to the danger for critics who stray too far from Whitman's own frames of reference, noting the lack of impact of critical approaches based on "a system of inquiry that comprehends Whitman's writing in terms other than those the poet himself preferred." The creative tension between Whitman and his readers is a key to Whitman's poetry, of course, and Killingsworth suggests it is also a key to Whitman scholarship, as Whitman's most erudite readers work to make him say things he has not said before. How many of these things would Whitman have agreed with or even recognized? How much does that matter? Whitman wanted his work to live and grow; he wanted his readers to do their share of the active work; he wanted to "leave the best untold"—but he also wanted to write his own reviews, instruct his readers, correct what he saw as misinterpretations. Looking at some of the most recent works on Whitman, Killingsworth concludes that today's critics often "interpret the poet's work as an anxious struggle to resist any force that would restrict the growth of his own poems, while yet, especially in his later poetry and prose, he labors to authorize certain views of *Leaves of Grass* that would severely restrict the growth of an unauthorized critical tradition." Whitman's ambivalent desire to liberate and shackle his readers has generated a century-long dialogue in Whitman studies, a pendulum-swing between familiar and unfamiliar Whitmans, between Whitman-as-he-wanted-us-to-have-him and Whitman-as-we-want-him. Killingsworth shows that, given what our (political, academic, democratic, sexual) culture has become, we continue to make some incredible demands on Whitman and his work.