

has described the “old weird America” of early twentieth-century musicians and performers, and the term can be equally applied to the much older, yet equally fascinating community of poets, performers, critics, and carousers who frequented Pfaff’s beer cellar before their scene was shattered by the Civil War.

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ED FOLSOM. “Walt Whitman.” *Oxford Bibliographies in American Literature*, ed. Jackson R. Bryer, Richard Kopley, and Paul Lauter. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. oxfordbibliographies.com.

What?! Another bibliography of Walt Whitman?! Don’t we already have excellent ones by Scott Giantvalley for 1839-1939, Donald Kummings for 1840-1975 (and, within the previous spread of years, Evie Allison Allen for 1945-1960, James Tanner for 1961-1967, and William White’s bibliographies in the *Walt Whitman Review* through 1982), Brent Gibson for 1976-1985, not to mention the regular bibliographies in *WWQR* and *American Literary Scholarship*, and, of course, the omnipotent MLA Bibliography? And then there’s the monolithic *Walt Whitman Archive* with its vast searchable bibliography. Well, the answer is “yes,” we do need another, different type of bibliography.

When I started graduate school in the late 1960s, everyone had to create their own bibliographies (unless they were fortunate enough to have had someone do it before them). For Whitman, that meant Gay Wilson Allen’s *Handbook* (1946), *American Literary Scholarship* (which had only begun with the volume covering 1963), and slogging through annual issues of the MLA Bibliography. Now, of course, everything is either on the web or accessible through a database, or so our students would have us believe. Personally, I think bibliographical control today is a lot like the parable of Buridan’s ass, where the hungry and thirsty creature is placed midway between hay and water, and, unable to choose between them, dies of hunger. Today’s researcher (and especially one early in an educational or professional career) begins a topic confronted by multiple piles of bibliographical data and, overwhelmed by the choices and lacking guidance as to their value, intellectually starves by slinking away in defeat, guessing what is worthwhile, or cutting and pasting from Wikipedia.

All of which is to say that Ed Folsom’s *Oxford Bibliographies* annotated guide to a century and a half of Whitman criticism is a most welcome *vade mecum* for the novice and an opportunity to compare evaluations for the advanced reader. After a brief biography of Whitman, Folsom presents sections on General Overviews, Scholarly Print Editions (with sub-sections on *Leaves of Grass*, Early Poems and Fiction, Manuscripts and Notebooks, Nonfiction Writing, Correspondence, Journalism, Comprehensive Reading Editions), Reference Works (General, Bibliographies), Archives, Biographies (General, Family, Friends, and Disciples, Personal Reminiscences), Journals, Reception, Whitman and Other Writers (General, Modern American and British

Writers, International Writers), and, of course, the largest category, Criticism, with sub-sections on History of Criticism, Collections, Foreground of *Leaves of Grass*, Reading "Song of Myself," Printing and Journalism, Sexuality, American Bohemianism, Civil War and Reconstruction, Race, Slavery, Ethnicity, Philosophy and Religion, Language and Discourse Theory, Politics and Culture, Science and Ecology, the Arts, and Pedagogy.

I present the above Whitmanesque catalogue to give a sense of how wide a net Folsom has cast in choosing his topics. The entries for books and articles are in alphabetical order, and provide full bibliographical information and a brief descriptive annotation. Entries can be exported to note-taking software or emailed. Subscribers may also save citations and annotate them. This reviewer, who has been guilty of quite a few bibliographies himself, fully appreciates the amount of material Folsom has had to sift through in order to choose the best; he himself states that there have been "over a hundred books and thousands of articles on Whitman since just the mid-1990s." Folsom has brought his thirty-plus years as editor of the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* (and compiler of its bibliographies) to bear in making a judicious selection of the best and most useful works available, and has provided succinct yet informative annotations. And the bibliography is regularly updated. Anyone considering compiling an author bibliography should look at Folsom's Whitman for a model.

But, back to my original question: *Why?* As good as the printed bibliographies may be, and despite the tremendous resources available on the *Walt Whitman Archive*, anyone working on Whitman is still faced with thousands of choices, including many bad and duplicative works. Even the *Archive*, with its excellent search functions, still depends on using keywords to locate material and, even though the results are annotated (from previously published sources), they have not been culled for the most useful or best items. In short, it is now easier to find more than one would want, but still hard to find what one really needs. Folsom's bibliography performs at least three important functions: first, it reduces a large mass of material into a manageable amount; second, it provides useful annotations that allow readers to decide which works are useful for their purpose; and, third, by providing so many sub-sections, it helps readers who are looking for scholarship on just a facet of Whitman's life or work to zero in on it.

The scope of Whitman bibliography may be large and contain multitudes, but, thanks to Ed Folsom, we can now discern the heartier leaves in the otherwise overwhelming lawn.

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