

REVIEWS

Donald D. Kummings, *Walt Whitman, 1940-1975: A Reference Guide*. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1982. xiv, 264 pp. \$45.00.

"During the period from 1940 through 1975," says Professor Kummings, "Walt Whitman emerges as the foremost poet of America and as one of the truly outstanding poets of the world," and criticism of the poet moves toward a deepening concern with his poetry rather than his personality or doctrines. The thirty-six years covered by Kummings show a resurgence of Whitman's reputation ("We Need Walt Whitman Today, Even More than Shakespeare," declared the irrepressible Harry Golden in 1959), a refinement of scholarship, a growing availability of accurate source materials and texts (culminating in the monumental New York University edition of the works), and above all a developing appreciation of Whitman's artistry.

The first fifteen of these years produced a slow but valuable flow of studies of widening scope and originality. But the year 1955 was the *annus mirabilis* of Whitman scholarship: Gay Wilson Allen's *The Solitary Singer*, Fredson Bowers's study of the 1860 manuscripts, the catalogues of the Library of Congress collection and of Charles E. Feinberg's Detroit exhibit, Richard Chase's provocative biography, and more than one hundred other items. In the productive second half of the decade, James E. Miller, Jr.'s *A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass* set the tone for studying Whitman chiefly as an artist and the inauguration of the *Walt Whitman Newsletter* (later *Walt Whitman Review*) established a forum for Whitman studies and for Whitman bibliography.

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed a profusion of Whitman studies, including many of outstanding merit: the first volumes of the New York University edition, facsimile editions of the poems, the appearance in English of Roger Asselineau's major study, and a significant volume of foreign scholarship. Three separate collections of "essays for study" in 1962 attested to Whitman's secure place in the college classroom. Moreover, the last decade covered by the bibliography illustrates two parallel trends in Whitman scholarship: a tendency toward historicity and a search for approaches which (as Edward Reiss suggested) would help to correct the errors caused by too much emphasis on literary history and biography.

In reviewing these pages one is reminded of Emerson's precept that fulfilling one's life work "is a supreme pleasure. . . . The best things are of secular growth." The present healthy status of Whitman scholarship is largely attributable to the persevering labors of many men and women. In the early 1940s Sculley Bradley and Irving C. Story called for an accurate analysis of the editions of *Leaves of Grass* and for a variorum of the printed editions: the former task took scholars three decades, the latter four. Floyd Stovall's publication of *The Foreground of Leaves of Grass* in 1974 had been preceded by some three dozen of his Whitman studies since 1941. In three decades Roger Asselineau contributed about five dozen Whitman items, Gay Wilson Allen some six dozen, and William White about two hundred.

Professor Kummings's handsome bibliography consists of about three thousand entries of books, dissertations, articles in periodicals, and sections of books. Except for reprints, reviews, and some foreign language pieces, a short and nonevaluative

comment (rarely exceeding one hundred words) is appended to each entry. Generally, only the introductory sections of editions and collections are commented on, so that their scope is not easily discernible. On the basis of these entries alone, a reader might be hard put to single out the more important works of Whitman scholarship.

Unlike Scott Giantvalley's companion volume covering the 1838–1939 period (see *WWR*, 28: 101–103), Kummings does not include allusions or minor references but he does record items in foreign languages. Works in French and German are accorded English-language comments, a very helpful practice; but works in other languages are not. Typically, Fernando Alegria's *Walt Whitman en Hispano-américa*, a 422-page book, receives only the comment: "In Spanish." Nonetheless, Kummings's inclusiveness and workmanship are commendable. In a casual survey of the entries for two comparable years in Kummings's volume and Jeanetta Boswell's *Walt Whitman and the Critics* (see *WWR*, 27:46), I found Kummings's entries more accurate and far more numerous. Very commendable too is his extensive analytical index, an extraordinary research tool, with over one hundred subject headings exclusive of proper names or the titles of Whitman's poems. Where else can one locate two articles on Walt Whitman and the calendar, or five articles on Whitman's humor, or forty-five pieces devoted to "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"? All in all, this is an indispensable contribution to Whitman studies, deserving a place in every library.

California State University, Long Beach

HAROLD ASPIZ

Walt Whitman. *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*. Edited by Justin Kaplan. New York: The Library of America, 1982. 1380 pp. \$25.00.

So much praise has been heaped upon The Library of America series that further accolades seem superfluous. Clearly this ongoing project to give America attractive, durable and available collected editions of the works of its best authors is one of the most noteworthy publishing endeavors in our history. Whitman scholars can be thankful that the Library of America edition of Whitman's poetry and prose was chosen as one of the inaugural volumes (with volumes of Hawthorne, Melville, and Stowe) in the series. *Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Collected Prose* sets out to do for the general reader what the more elaborate ongoing New York University Press *Collected Writings of Walt Whitman* sets out to do for the specialist: to offer in one convenient place all the material that the user could possibly want. The Library of America edition is edited by Justin Kaplan, and he has chosen the material wisely. He includes the complete 1855 *Leaves of Grass* in facsimile (a true facsimile here, without the bracketed later titles and later section markings that we get in Malcolm Cowley's Penguin edition of the 1855 *Leaves*), the complete 1891–92 "death-bed edition" (the 1881 *Leaves* with its two old-age annexes and "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads"), the Complete Prose Works, 1892 (*Specimen Days, Collect, Notes Left Over, Pieces in Early Youth, November Boughs, Good-Bye My Fancy, and Memoranda*), and a bonus section of "Supplementary Prose" including "The