

REVIEWS

JOEL MYERSON, ED. *The Walt Whitman Archive: A Facsimile of the Poet's Manuscripts*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1993. 3 volumes, 6 parts. lxxxvi + 2,068 pp. \$1,040.

This is the first substantial collection of facsimiles of Whitman's manuscripts, and it completes Joel Myerson's remarkable trilogy of Whitman bibliographic projects, beginning with his collection of hard-to-find memoirs and recollections of the poet (*Whitman in His Own Time* [1991]) and including his massive *Walt Whitman: A Bibliography* (1993), the most thorough descriptive bibliography of the poet's work. Over the past couple of years, Myerson has made available in these three publications 3,500 pages of materials and information that previously had been available only to those scholars who had the time, money, and inclination to travel to the major Whitman collections, and who had the patience to sift through mountainous archives.

The Walt Whitman Archive is an ambitious attempt to gather the most important Whitman manuscripts and provide libraries (and well-heeled scholars) photographic reproductions of major parts of the key Whitman collections. The *Archive* contains materials from the Library of Congress (Feinberg Collection), Duke University (Trent Collection), the University of Virginia (Barrett Collection), and the University of Texas (Hanley Collection in the Humanities Research Center). Included are manuscripts of poems and notes for poems, proof sheets of poems, slips (poems Whitman had printed to send out to magazines for use as printer's copy), and corrected proofs of *Leaves of Grass*. Many of the manuscripts reproduced here have been reprinted in various books over the past century, but never before have we been given such a treasure-trove of high quality photographic facsimiles, reproductions that bring us tantalizingly close to the actual documents.

In these volumes, however, we also experience some of the disorientation and confusion that most scholars feel when they first begin sifting through a major collection of Whitman materials. After working with the *Archive* for several months, I am still not quite sure exactly what we have here. Not all of Whitman's manuscripts from the Library of Congress, Duke, Virginia, and Texas are included. What criteria were used for the selections? Myerson is uncharacteristically vague about this. We also are left wondering about the relationships between the manuscripts and revised proofs from the different collections. Unfortunately, Myerson does not give us much help and guidance. Everything is arranged by collection instead of by affinity of materials. We get a minimal table of contents in each volume, a very brief introduction, and disappointingly terse descriptions of the collections. There is no index and virtually no cross-referencing. If a particular collection furnished explanatory cards or catalogues, Myerson includes facsimiles of those, but he offers no additional aids. If users want to find all the notes, manuscript versions, and revised proofs for a particular poem, they will have to leaf through the two

thousand pages here, searching the materials somewhat randomly, much as they would if they were visiting the actual manuscript collections. A proof sheet of "Sparkles from the Wheel," for example, is listed in the table of contents only under the title of that poem, but when we turn to it, we find that there are also important proofs of "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors" and "Fables," which are not listed in the contents. Similarly, a holograph draft of "A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest" is found among Whitman's drafts of "O Captain! My Captain!," but only "O Captain!" is listed in the contents. Without an index or more complete listing of contents, users can only hope to stumble upon such "hidden" items. A comprehensive index would have made these volumes far more user-friendly.

Compounding the confusion is the organization of the volumes and the uncertain scope of the *Archive* project. Garland Publishing advertises the *Archive* as three volumes, but in fact there are six. Each of the three "volumes" is divided into two "parts," and each "part" contains a table of contents for the complete "volume." In the advertising brochure for the *Archive*, Myerson says that "In the future, Garland intends to publish further volumes of Whitman's manuscripts from other university collections," but such expansion is apparently only theoretically projected (no further volumes are in process). It will be important for scholars to keep in mind that several important collections of Whitman material—including those at Yale, New York Public Library, and the Huntington Library—are not represented here, and that, even with this vast wealth of material, the *Archive* is in no way a complete or even necessarily indicative record.

Each volume presents the materials in a different way. In the first volume (and sporadically in the other two volumes), poems that were published in periodicals or in collections outside of *Leaves* are keyed in the table of contents to Myerson's *Walt Whitman: A Bibliography*, thus allowing readers to turn to his descriptive bibliography for further information about the published appearances of the particular poem (and also assuring that his bibliography becomes an essential purchase for any institutions or individuals owning the *Archive*). The second volume reprints the *Catalogue of the Whitman Collection in the Duke University Library*, which is helpful, but that catalogue was put together in 1945 and is keyed to the 1902 "Camden Edition" of the *Complete Writings of Walt Whitman*, an outmoded compilation to which few scholars have easy access; that catalogue also does not take into account the many textual discoveries in the past several decades, so users will have to translate citations to more accessible and reliable texts. The third volume is keyed to Fredson Bowers's 1955 *Whitman's Manuscripts: Leaves of Grass (1860), A Parallel Text*, where most of the Virginia materials were first published.

While many of the manuscripts included here will be familiar to Whitman scholars, it is nonetheless revelatory to encounter them in photographic facsimile. The advantage of true facsimiles is that all the usual textual apparatus melts away; we've all encountered arcane systems concocted by textual editors to try to indicate in print just what a messy and much-revised manuscript looks like. In the *Archive* we can confront the original mess and know that the confusion and difficulty belong to Whitman and are not the aftereffects of bizarre editorial schemes. A case in point is Fredson Bowers's *Whitman's Manuscripts*, a valuable

book that has not had the impact it might have had, in large part because of the complexity of the editorial presentation of Whitman's bewildering profusion of manuscripts leading to the 1860 *Leaves*. Scholars who have puzzled over Bowers's transcriptions and explanations will appreciate the straightforward presentation of the facsimiles in the *Archive*, where we can actually witness the astounding transformations as Whitman shapes the "Calamus" and "Children of Adam" clusters.

A good portion of the *Archive* is dedicated to the reprinting of Whitman's corrected proof sheets and printer's copies for various editions of *Leaves*. These are generally of less interest than the manuscripts, but they do document Whitman's obsessive reworking of punctuation in his poetry, including his shifts of dashes to commas and (in 1881) his widespread deletion of semicolons. In the printer's copy for the 1881-82 *Leaves*, for example, we can see Whitman's careful fine-tuning of the remarkable punctuation in "A Noiseless Patient Spider," as he removes commas and gives his lines a more seamless flow.

The Walt Whitman Archive is a fine addition to the resources for study of Whitman. Garland Publishing, through its facsimile series, has for years been making available to all libraries the research materials previously accessible only in one place. Myerson's large selection of Whitman materials finally whets, rather than satisfies, the scholarly appetite: I find myself wanting more of the materials from the libraries included, and I would like to see more collections represented. But it is wonderful to have these two thousand pages where before there was nothing. It is impossible to tell just what effect these volumes will have on Whitman scholarship, but it is safe to say that their impact will soon be felt and will be significant and long lasting.

The University of Iowa

ED FOLSOM

HAROLD BLOOM. *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. New York, San Diego, London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994. 578 pp. \$29.95.

The title is deliberately combative: *The Western Canon*. There are enemies out there, and Professor Bloom knows who they are: "Feminists, Marxists, Lacanians, New Historicists, Deconstructionists, Semioticians"—all of whom Bloom gathers under the contentious epithet, "the School of Resentment." (Another version of the list includes "Afrocentrists" as well.) In this age of multicultural pluralism, Professor Bloom finds degeneracy rampant and loss pervasive. "We are," he asserts, "destroying all intellectual and aesthetic standards in the humanities and social sciences, in the name of social justice."

Bloom admits defeat. Ideology has triumphed, and the glories of great literature are becoming rare pastimes for the fortunate few. Nevertheless, Bloom defends aesthetic values even as they succumb to ideological attack. Asserting "the autonomy of imaginative literature and the sovereignty of the solitary soul" against those "who believe that literary study should be an overt crusade for social change," Bloom, following his master, Emerson (and after him, Pater and Wilde), puts the individual firmly at the center, arguing that