

book's origins as an interactive e-book.

Readers are aware of the constant American focus in the book, and so assemblage is thus a fitting approach to a history of Walt Whitman in America. Like the “teeming nation of nations,” *With Walt Whitman: Himself* abounds in the disparate brought together. Despite Huets’s claim that “Walt’s poetry cannot be forced to an agenda or ideology,” the book also argues that “he wanted his poetry to affirm and inspire his country” (15, emphasis added). Through assemblage, Huets succeeds in reproducing that multivalent and conflicted country, draping the 34-star 1861 flag on the cover over every entry in the book. Huets presents a view of *Leaves of Grass* consonant with Thoreau’s observation, quoted on page 110, that “on the whole it is to me very brave and American.”

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ÉRIC ATHENOT AND CRISTANNE MILLER, eds. *Whitman & Dickinson: A Colloquy*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2017. viii + 280 pp.

Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson were each born into families with long histories in rural communities. Both families experienced financial stresses during the poets’ childhoods that removed them from family homes at a young age. Dickinson was two when her grandparents sold The Homestead on Amherst, Massachusetts’ Main Street, and moved to Cincinnati. Her parents stayed on as tenants of the new owner for seven years, then bought a different home in Amherst, where they lived for another fifteen. For Whitman, the break was more extreme: he left school at age eleven, taking a job in Brooklyn. He moved between urban and rural settings throughout his childhood and youth, and from city to city in adulthood. While Dickinson was never so peripatetic, most of her known time away from Amherst took place during these 22 years. The story of Whitman’s unsettlement accords easily with, and has perhaps animated, a familiar narrative of his life and work that combines loss of rural

innocence, a wandering spirit, and rugged resilience against adversity. By contrast, the narrative of Dickinson's unsettlement jars with a familiar one that presents Dickinson's life as settled, protected, and privileged, and her work as insular and secluded. She was 24 years old before her father managed to buy back the home with which she is still closely associated, remaining there for 31 years, from 1855 until her death in 1886. Whitman also found long-term stability in his final home, in Camden, New Jersey, between 1873 and his death in 1892. For both poets, debilitating illness made it difficult to travel during the last decades of their lives. Nothing here will be new to scholars of Whitman and Dickinson. Yet looking at these unsettlements and their results alongside one another raises questions. Among these are: how did the respective educational attainments and social classes of their fathers determine the trajectory of these narratives? How has gender informed biographical and critical readings of the poets' relative financial and domestic stability in childhood? Was Whitman's aesthetic, thematic, and formal rule-breaking made possible by his family's exile from West Hills, and was Dickinson's made possible by her return to the Homestead and the bedroom she associated with freedom?

However we answer such questions, the stress of an unsettled early childhood is one small, possibly telling, resonance between Whitman and Dickinson's lives, largely overlooked in both popular understanding and the critical literature. *Whitman & Dickinson: A Colloquy*, points to many more, and more substantive, ways the lives, interests, and works of these two foundational American poets intersected. Often read together in the classroom, considered originators of distinctive strains of American poetics, and the subjects of ongoing and vibrant critical discourses, they are seldom put into critical proximity nearer than separate dissertation and monograph chapters. Their differences stand out, of course, and make for compelling contrast: Whitman, "one of the roughs," oratorical and hectoring, a poet of long lines and self-promotion, contrasts easily with Dickinson, genteel and gnomic, the hidden-away hymnodist. Yet, looked at from a different angle, how much they had in common! This useful and long-overdue collection of essays asks us to read with these common aesthetic inter-

ests, cultural contexts, and biographical intersections in mind.

As Ed Folsom points out in the opening chapter, “Rethinking the (Non)Convergence of Dickinson and Whitman,” the two poets’ lives were in near orbit at numerous points. To cite just one example, the firm Roberts Brothers published both poets through the intercession of its influential editor Thomas Niles. It seems reassuringly in character that Whitman published a book, *After All, Not to Create Only*, with Roberts Brothers, but declined to participate in the anonymous 1878 collection *A Masque of Poets*, while Dickinson published a poem there but deflected Niles’ entreaty to send him enough poems for a collection. That volume would appear in 1890, four years after her death, co-edited by Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the well-connected writer-editor whose advice Dickinson sought, then ignored, during her lifetime.

Folsom’s chapter situates Higginson’s championing of Dickinson with Emerson’s of Whitman in the context of deeper tensions within the Transcendentalist circle. Higginson shows up in a few other places in the collection, but Emerson seems to hover over and inform its framing, providing a shared originary source or stimulus for the two poets. Marianne Noble’s chapter, “Phenomenological Approaches to Human Contact,” contrasts Emerson’s understanding of human connection as fundamentally “counterfeit” with Whitman’s and Dickinson’s seeming belief in the possibility of genuinely transactional and intersubjective relationships. Jennifer Leader’s essay on “the numinous” argues that Transcendentalism provided both poets ways to reconcile their religious upbringings with secular adulthoods and writing projects that present awe as a secular experience. Jay Grossman’s “Queer Contingencies of Canonicity” focuses on Emerson as a touchstone for an earlier critic, F.O. Matthiessen, who included Whitman in his canon-making 1941 *American Renaissance*, which, oddly, excluded Dickinson. A male poetic lineage was safer for the closeted Matthiessen in print, though he lauded Dickinson privately, with unfortunate consequences for her (and other women writers’) place in the midcentury canon. Grossman’s account of canonical contingency closes with an account of Matthiessen’s former student Adrienne Rich, queering, so to speak, both Dickinson and Matthiessen.

This is a rich, complex, culturally engaged re-reading that puts not only the poets, but also their critical histories, in conversation. As such, it is in character with the level of critical engagement in the volume as a whole, which revisits familiar topics in Dickinson and Whitman studies, but makes them new by reading across the two critical streams. Subject interests range across war (Cecile Roudeau's "'Sickly Abstractions' and the Poetic Concrete"), Biblical typology (Shira Wolosky's "Dickinson | Whitman: Figural Mirrors in Biblical Traditions"), the natural world (Christine Gerhardt's chapter on "Place and Mobility in Dickinson and Whitman's Environmental Poetry"), and humor (Andrew Dorkin and Cristanne Miller focus on hyperbole). Vincent Dussol's chapter examines details of language choice, specifically the "legacy of lists" and use of an undefined "it" in the poets' work. Adrienne Rich animates a second chapter, Marina Camboni's. Finally, Betsy Erkkila catalogues some of the less obvious personal and poetic resonances the two poets share.

The introduction, by the volume's editors, Éric Athenot and Cristanne Miller, is aptly subtitled "Transatlantic Convergences and New Directions." Contributors from France, Germany, Italy, and the United States are represented, at a variety of career stages, from graduate students to senior scholars. The volume grew out of a gathering in Paris in 2015, in the wake of the attacks on the offices of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. These "brutally tragic social, political, and cultural challenges" clearly lent urgency to the proceedings, which the editors deem "a reassertion of the lasting power of poetry in times of unrest and disarray" (2). This is surely an appropriate mandate for a project bringing into conversation two culturally and politically engaged poets whose writing lives were galvanized and changed by upheaval of the US Civil War.

Whitman and Dickinson remain widely read, the subject of continuing critical interest. In recent decades, Whitman and Dickinson scholars have been at the forefront of new critical paradigms, including feminist, gender, and sexuality studies, digital humanities, ecocriticism, and historical poetics. The two poets are also public figures, even celebrities, more than 100 years after their deaths. They are read by the public with an unusual level of personal enthusiasm and iden-

tification, and by K-12 students and undergraduates in conversation with one another, yet, inexplicably, separately by graduate students and literary critics. This volume demonstrates that our degree of fine specialization comes with costs. New critical possibilities await in considering topics such as Whitman's and Dickinson's illnesses, their musical engagement, and their shared admiration for the Brontë sisters and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, to name just a few possibilities. In the meantime, the present volume's range of subject matter and critical stances offers entry points for both experts and relatively novice readers. For example, Erkkilä's chapter will be accessible and useful to undergraduates, as it brings together and concisely describes some of the major shared themes in Dickinson and Whitman criticism since the 1980s. Other chapters require at least a passing knowledge of existing critical conversations and terminology, though in all cases the notes provide useful directions to further reading.

Let us have more like this, please: more colloquies, more explorations of these poets' shared (and contrasting) biographies, interests, aesthetics, and writing practices, and more engagement across critical communities.

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