

be sure, it implicitly proves the larger claims set forth by Thomas in his introduction.

Overall, *Transatlantic Connections* is a deeply researched, persuasively argued, cross-cultural reception study combined with historical contextualization (drawing upon biography, urban studies, and literary history, among other fields). Thomas's cultural-contextual analyses almost always function to deepen our understanding of the poems, and this book contains many fresh readings of familiar and relatively neglected works by Whitman, along with poems by Longfellow, Carpenter, Lawrence, and a series of important Welsh poets. Thomas generally writes in a lucid, jargon-free style; however, there are moments when the multiplication of sub-arguments and supporting examples can seem bewildering, particularly given the backwards-and-forwards chronologies and repetitions of the "Whitman U.S." section. The first chapter, for example, seems to conclude more times than the film version of the *Return of the King*. On the whole, the book reflects its origin as a series of separately published essays rather than a planned monograph.

Of course, it hardly needs saying that *Transatlantic Connections* amounts to more than a collection of discrete essays; each of the nine chapters illuminates the others in highly productive ways (particularly one, two, and four, five and six, and seven and eight), but, I think, this is a case in which two books might have been better than one. I am reluctant to agree with Thomas's view that historical contextualism is reaching a point of "diminishing returns"—particularly given the ample evidence he provides to the contrary—but I did wish for a more fully realized example of the kind of innovative, intercultural projects on Whitman for which Thomas calls in his introduction (xiii).

*Hope College*

WILLIAM PANNAPACKER

ARNIE KANTROWITZ. *Walt Whitman*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2005. 181 pp.

In 2005, Chelsea House Publishers inaugurated a Gay and Lesbian Writers Series with six titles. To judge from Arnie Kantrowitz's *Walt Whitman*, the series is intended to offer compact, impressionistic, neophyte-friendly biographies that are attentive, as the publisher announces, to how "well-known writers . . . struggled with the perceptions created by their sexual preferences." The format is modest: ten brief chapters (with a sprinkling of compact sidebars on such topics as phrenology, Whitman's notebooks, and Lincoln's assassination), no illustrations, no endnotes, a bare-bones chronology, and a very selective bibliography. Whitman's company in the series' class of 2005 includes James Baldwin, Allen Ginsberg, Adrienne Rich, Sappho, and Oscar Wilde.

Though Kantrowitz is a longtime professor of English at CUNY's College of Staten Island, he is better known as a post-Stonewall activist. He was a vice president, in 1971, of the pioneering Gay Activists Alliance, then a founder of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) in 1985. He has also authored *Under the Rainbow: Growing Up Gay* (1977) and countless

contributions to the gay periodical press. I remember one of these with particular pleasure: "Who Owns Walt Whitman?" (*Harvard Gay & Lesbian Review*, Fall 1997). This rousing screed grew out of Kantrowitz's involvement with a protest group—aptly named after the Calamus cluster—that vociferously chided an elaborate new New York State-funded Visitors' Interpretive Center at the Whitman birthplace on Long Island for its blatant suppression of the gay texts and subtexts of the poet's life. "Whitman remains great even when only partially understood," Kantrowitz scathingly observed, "but his genius deserves to be known in all its glory." (A visit to the center a year later left me eager to join the protest. I was bemused to discover my *Walt Whitman: A Gay Life* on full-frontal display in its gift shop—but, alas, sans book-jacket and thus quite anonymous.)

Whether through editorial decision or because, like Whitman, Kantrowitz has mellowed with age, this volume addresses the controversial subject in a "cool," almost deadpan, non-confrontational fashion. Or is it, perhaps, simply that the subject is becoming steadily less controversial? Has the need for protesting too much finally begun to fade? In any event, this elegantly and unpretentiously written thumbnail life does not seek to evoke the truculent, challenging, flamboyant, risk-smitten Whitman who catches our eye in the frontispiece likeness of the 1855 *Leaves*. Think rather of the Whitman in later photographs—benign and leonine in clean white linen.

Not that Kantrowitz is shy about claiming certain fee simple rights in the "ownership" of the poet on behalf of gay readers. He writes in his afterword, "That [Whitman] managed to become his nation's most revered poet in spite of—or because of—his homosexual sensibility is a testament to the universality of same-sex love." Then he ends, "Even though Whitman felt he had to deny himself, his promise to the gay readers who were to come after him has been fulfilled: 'O you shunned persons, I at least do not shun you, / I come forthwith in your midst, I will be your poet, / I will be more to you than to any of the rest.'"

This well-mannered but quite un-coy presentation of the gay Whitman deserves to be on every high school library shelf in the land.

Necessarily surfing on the surface most of the time, Kantrowitz might have made it easier for readers to go deeper into Whitman by identifying sources for all his Whitman quotations and memorable prose extracts, such as the poet's poignant rhetorical question in manuscript, "Why is it that a sense comes always crushing on me as of one happiness I have missed in life?," or Thayer and Eldridge's wonderful letter offering to print the 1860 *Leaves*.

There are a few minor mistakes along the way. Whitman did not write self-reviews "under pseudonyms"; they were simply unsigned. Though Maria was one of her given names, Whitman's idolized diva performed as Marietta Alboni, and she was, significantly, not a soprano but a contralto. Horace Traubel was not a married man when he began taking notes for *With Walt Whitman in Camden*.

A few of Kantrowitz's points might be debated. Reference is made to the "rich baritone" Whitman voice audible on an Edison cylinder made in 1890, but this does not square with Richard Maurice Bucke, who said in the manu-

script version of his Whitman biography that the voice was of a higher register, that of a “sort of male castrato, a false soprano.” Kantrowitz avoids critical cartwheels over the passages he generously quotes. Only one evaluative judgment struck me as arguable, his comment that “O Captain! My Captain!” is one of Whitman’s “least artistic poems.” One could just as well say it is far too artistic, an aberrational performance that the poet—whose credo in his heyday was “Damn art, and let fly!”—came to regret deeply. “If I’d written a whole volume of ‘My Captains’ I’d deserve to be spanked and sent to bed with the world’s compliments,” Whitman remarked to Traubel in 1888.

*Hunter College, The City University of New York*

GARY SCHMIDGALL