REVIEWS

ED FOLSOM AND KENNETH M. PRICE. *Re-Scripting Walt Whitman: An Introduction to His Life and Work.* Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005. xv + 156 pp.

The requirements of Blackwell's new "Introductions to Literature" series are simple: produce a brief guide to the topic at hand suitable for undergraduates. Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price could no doubt do this sort of thing of thing in their sleep. However, their *Re-Scripting Walt Whitman* is far more than an introductory guide to the poet's life and work. Folsom and Price have produced an incisive, gracefully written book that offers an important new approach to *Leaves of Grass*. Based on their work on the electronic *Walt Whitman Archive*, as well as their familiarity with Whitman's manuscripts, they treat *Leaves of Grass* as process as much as product. Like other writers before them, they organize their narrative around the successive editions of *Leaves*, but they give as much attention to unpublished drafts as to printed volumes. Throughout, they demonstrate how a focus on the processes of writing and bookmaking can reveal multiple layers in the poetry, the way that a reference to the poet's face puns on typeface, how "body" may simultaneously signify the human body, a body of work, and the text itself.

The most strikingly original sections of *Re-Scripting Walt Whitman* occur in Folsom and Price's discussion of the manuscript origins of *Leaves of Grass*. They reprint a one-page manuscript fragment of "Song of Myself" held at the University of Texas and explain how its nine lines wound up scattered throughout the published poem, then trace the evolution of a single line ("And the cow crunching with depressed head surpasses any statue") through notebook to manuscript to first edition and beyond: Whitman uses the same image in *Memoranda During the War, Specimen Days,* and in conversation with Horace Traubel. Their discussion of the Lucifer section of "The Sleepers" is equally thorough and illuminating—they trace this section through four different manuscript versions and point out that here, "for the first time in American poetry, a white poet turns over the narration . . . to a black character" (49). Folsom and Price's extended discussions of the crunching cow and the angry slave show their respect for their intended audience of undergraduates, their confidence that readers new to Whitman can closely follow a trail of manuscript evidence, can resist the yearning for one single, conclusive version of a poem and can grapple with the messy contradictions of a poet who "refus[es] to reach conclusion" (ix).

Folsom and Price are similarly disinclined to reach simple conclusions. Whitman has attracted plenty of either/or critics; they are resolutely both/and. Discussing the origins of the 1855 edition and the transformation of a hack journalist, poet, and fiction writer into America's most original poet, they distinguish between the "romantic" view—Whitman underwent some sort of spiritual illumination—and the "pragmatic" view that he had a calculated,

disciplined strategy to create a new poetic voice in line with Emerson's call in "The Poet" for a distinctively American bard. They insist that Whitman was *both* "sage and huckster," that he "touched the gods with ink-smudged fingers" and "was concerned as much with the sales and reviews of his books as with the state of the human soul" (25).

Similarly, in their discussion of the controversial topic of Whitman's sexuality, they point out that nothing in his poems prohibits one from concluding that Whitman endorsed genital sexuality between men, "but neither do they require that conclusion" (65). Mystery is an essential component of Whitman's love poetry, and that holds true for "Children of Adam" as well as "Calamus": "A Woman Waits for Me" is as much about the intimacy of poet and reader as about sexual union.

Re-Scripting Walt Whitman leaves out much that some readers might consider essential: psychoanalytically informed consideration of the ways in which Whitman's career and work can be seen as attempts to deal with the legacy of his spectacularly dysfunctional family, analysis of such major poems as "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" or "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," or extended discussion of his work's grounding in nineteenth-century U.S. culture—this last a subject treated at length by both Folsom and Price in previous books. But in order to bring in their book at under 150 pages, the authors necessarily leave much unsaid—a tactic appropriate in treating a poet who believed that the strongest and sweetest songs yet remain to be sung. The strategic omissions allow Folsom and Price to emphasize at length Whitman's script(s), his handwritten drafts and successive revisions of *Leaves of Grass*. The result is a book valuable for whoever, novice or expert, undertakes to hold Walt Whitman in hand.

The College of New Jersey   MICHAEL ROBERTSON

EZRA GREENSPAN. *Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself": A Sourcebook and Critical Edition*. New York: Routledge, 2005. 210 pp.

Ezra Greenspan's *Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself": A Sourcebook and Critical Edition* will be eagerly annexed to the syllabi of many secondary and undergraduate English courses and will provide a generation of teachers with a standard pedagogical tool for their course work. This breakthrough sourcebook, in the notable *Routledge Guides to Literature* series, follows in the wake of the classic Edwin Haviland Miller volume, *Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself": A Mosaic of Interpretations* (1989), but Greenspan provides many innovative features that make his volume an essential supplement to Miller's. Miller's text is a photocopy of the 1855 edition of Whitman's epic, along with a most useful critical genealogy attached as a series of appendices; but Miller's condensed atlas of criticism tends to classify the poem according to the various strategies that have tried to contain the polymorphous work within certain critical models of coherence. Miller lays out some of the classical structuralist readings of Whitman's epic text, such as James E. Miller's, Roy Harvey Pearce's, and R.